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

SELF ASSESSMENT REPORT OF THE KOSOVO ACCREDITATION AGENCY (KAA)

Contents

Introduction

The Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) is a regulatory agency that guarantees quality assurance in higher education in the Republic of Kosovo. Its mission is to support the development of quality in higher education institutions through external evaluation and to ensure Kosovo's society that the quality of higher education is at the level of international standards.

Since its establishment, KAA has aimed at transforming higher education in Kosovo through external evaluation, promoting reforms, and raising the awareness of higher education institutions about the importance of establishing and taking responsibility for a functional internal quality assurance system. The impact of KAA on the higher education system is evident. External quality evaluations conducted by KAA have ensured that only higher education institutions that meet the minimum quality criteria operate in the territory of the Republic of Kosovo. The external evaluations have not only allowed to keep in control the possible detrimental impact of mobility from other higher education systems without effective internal and external quality assurance but have also increased society's trust in diplomas and academic degrees obtained nationally. Throughout the years, KAA has significantly facilitated the establishment of a functional internal quality assurance system at higher education institutions, leading to the improvement of procedures and criteria for the selection of academic staff, the development of curricula that are learning outcomes based, the provision of a transparent higher education, and the better involvement of the academic community in different stages of governance and decision-making in higher education institutions.

Since its foundation, KAA has had a strategic goal of membership/registration in European quality assurance mechanisms such as the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). To this end, KAA has designed an external quality assurance system that meets the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Implementing the accreditation process and monitoring procedures in line with the ESG have contributed to aligning Kosovo's higher education system with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

KAA was subject to external evaluation for the first time in 2014. The outcome of the external review was positive, and KAA became a full member of ENQA. A year later, in 2015, KAA was also registered in EQAR. Due to interference from the political level in the agency's independence, KAA was excluded from EQAR in February 2018 and consequently subject to an extraordinary evaluation initiated by ENQA in 2019. As a result of the unfavourable circumstances for KAA at the time (lack of permanent management, limited human resources, postponed external assessment procedures, and lack of a fully independent decision-making SCQ), KAA failed to demonstrate substantial compliance

with ESG, particularly its ability to assume responsibility for independent decision-making, which consequently resulted in KAA's removal from ENQA.

KAA's removal from ENQA and EQAR caused an unprecedented social debate. As a result, over the past five years, KAA has been firmly committed to meeting the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and, most importantly, to restore KAA's status as an autonomous agency and to demonstrate that third parties do not influence its accreditation decisions. Throughout this period, the entire political spectrum, the academic community, civil society, international donors, etc., have supported these goals and in particular recognized the need to restore, consolidate and advance KAA's institutional and operational independence.

One of the main results of this commitment is the drafting and approval (in June 2023) of the KAA Law by the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo. The Law consolidates KAA's independence by defining its status as a regulatory agency in the Republic of Kosovo, responsible for drafting external evaluation policies and standards, and laying out clear rules for the appointment and dismissal of its SCQ and Director to ensure that KAA is independent organizationally and in its decision-making.

The role of KAA as the regulatory mechanism of quality in higher education has evolved in recent years. Besides the formal recognition of its accreditation decisions, KAA has been considered a key partner by all governmental agencies when drafting and approving various strategic documents affecting the entire education system and the employment schemes in Kosovo. KAA has participated in numerous donor projects. Project interventions, mainly through international expertise, have strongly supported and influenced KAA's performance improvement and, in multiple cases, also resulted in positive changes in the quality assurance practices of higher education institutions.

Over the past five years, new positive developments affecting the functioning of KAA have taken place. The legislative framework has been consolidated, the number of administrative staff has increased, the decision-making independence has been safeguarded through the introduction of additional legislative norms for the appointment of the SCQ members, the number of projects that KAA has benefited from international donors has increased, etc. Majority of its improvements reflect the strategic commitments set out under the KAA Strategic Plan, with particular emphasis the strategic objective to regain full membership to ENQA and registration on EQAR. Following the substantial developments and new circumstances, KAA has undergone a self-assessment process, the results of which are presented in the following report.

1. Company Development of the self-assessment report (SAR)

To draft this self-assessment report, the SCQ has appointed a core working group consisting of SCQ president Prof. Dr. Hasnija Ilazi, the Director of KAA Mr. Naim Gashi and the Director of the Department for Follow-Up Procedures Mr. Shkelzen Gerxhaliu.

The working group has carefully reviewed the requirements of the ESG and has evaluated the KAA processes and activities against those. The first draft of the self-evaluation report was discussed among the KAA staff and members of the SCQ in a workshop held in Ohrid on 23rd December 2023. Inputs gathered from the Ohrid workshop were further integrated into the content of the SER through another workshop held in the end of January 2024 in Prishtina, among the KAA staff, members of the SCQ, international donors and two representatives of higher education institutions.

After finalizing the self-evaluation report, the document was accessible for public discussion through the webpage. In addition, KAA send via email the self-evaluation report to all institutions of higher education, international experts, representatives of MESTI, international donor agencies, representatives of NGOs dealing with higher education, and student representatives of the University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

KAA received several comments from the international experts particularly and few comments from the higher education institutions. The working groups integrated all inputs and finalized the document in April 2024.

2. Higher Education and QA of higher education in the context of the agency

The main responsible authority for the development and implementation of legal and strategic policies in the Higher Education sector in Kosovo is the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI). Besides developing, implementing, and overseeing the higher education policies, MESTI is also responsible for the licensing of higher education institutions in Kosovo. Specific responsibilities for quality assurance of higher education are delegated to the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA), a regulatory agency. Moreover, the National Qualifications Authority (NQA), is an independent public agency responsible to develop the national qualifications framework and to regulate the national qualifications system.

The Law on Higher Education in the Republic of Kosovo supports a diverse higher education landscape in Kosovo, allowing for the development of HEIs in different modalities and formats. An accredited and licensed higher education institution in Kosovo can have the status of university, university-college, college, institute, school, or academy. According to the Law on Higher Education:

- the denomination 'University' may be granted only to an accredited provider of higher education which has provided accredited courses or programs for a minimum of at least four years in at least five different subject areas as defined in the sub legal act of the Ministry and who has issued at least one graduate with an accredited doctorate in each of these programs;
- the denomination 'University college' may be granted only to an accredited provider of higher education, which offers doctoral studies in at least three study areas which are accredited by KAA;
- the denomination 'college'
- the denomination 'institute'
- the denomination 'school of higher education'
- the denomination 'academy'

Pursuant to article 4 of the HE Law, higher education degrees are organized as following:

- ➢ First level – three (3) to four (4) years of studies during which the student obtains 180 to 240 ECTS and obtains a Bachelor's Diploma.
- ➢ Second level – one (1) to two (2) years of studies, after completion of the first level, during which the student obtains 60 to 120 ECTS and the student obtains a Master's Diploma.
- ➢ Third level – a programme of doctoral studies with an academic and independent research-scientific character; no standard length or ECTS range is defined for doctoral studies.

➢ Any other post-secondary education programme/offer in the levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, for which credits may be given (ECTS), but which do not lead to a full degree/diploma.

Pursuant to article 9 of the Law on HE, public higher education institutions in Kosovo may be established by a decision form MESTI, subsequently ratified in the Kosovo Assembly. Under article 12 of the Law, private higher education institutions may be 'founded by a private company, foundation, or trust, situated in Kosovo and having a registered office in Kosovo. However, the Law allows the operation of a higher education institution only after it has been granted accreditation by KAA and licensed by MESTI under the conditions of the law.

Currently, Kosovo's higher education system consists of 26 institutions, 9 of which are public and 17 privates. There are 382 study programs, 223 offered by public higher education institutions, and 159 by private institutions. There are 71,835 students attending higher education in Kosovo, of which 41,212 are in the public sector and 30,623 in the private sector.

Type	Public		Private	
	Number	Students	Number	Students
University	7	41652	-	
University-college	-		-	
College	1	329	15	28848
Institute	-		-	
School	1	259	-	
Academy	-		2	747

3. History, profile, and activities of the agency

3.1. Brief history of the agency and its legal framework

The establishment of an agency responsible for promoting quality in higher education was mandated by the Law on Higher Education of 2002. This Law envisaged that this agency would be the main authority in Kosovo to conduct licensing, inspection, and accreditation so that the quality of higher education institutions in Kosovo could develop and improve. The Law also provided for the establishment of the State Council of Quality (SCQ), which would be responsible for issuing decisions and recommendations for accreditation. Based on this Law, in 2004, through the Administrative Instruction for the Establishment of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) established the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA). The primary responsibilities under this administrative instruction included quality assessment and accreditation of public and private institutions.

The establishment of KAA took place at a time when the higher education system was expanding at fast pace with several private institutions of higher education that were operating without any stringent quality criteria or external assurance thereof. This expansion was characterized by different types of institutional statuses that could be created relatively easily, subject to MEST licensing, a more formal and technical process than substantive.

Pending the complete establishment and functioning of the KAA, higher education quality was not thoroughly assessed externally until 2008.

In 2008, the Government of the Republic of Kosovo invited the British Accreditation Council (BAC) to conduct an initial assessment of the 31 higher education institutions with a license from MEST granted between 2003 and 2008. About 13 higher education institutions underwent the evaluation process, while the rest merged with other institutions or ceased their activity before the evaluation took place. BAC conducted the assessment with about 63 international experts, resulting in negative accreditation recommendations for 12 HEIs – i.e. all but one – that were consequently not allowed to enroll new students.

KAA became fully operational in 2009 and carried out the first accreditation process in that year. The functioning of KAA was strongly supported by international projects that contributed to the design of accreditation procedures and standards and the professional development of KAA staff. The accreditation process was conducted in public and private institutions identically. The accreditation standards for the institutional level and study programs were designed in accordance with the ESG and drawing on the good practice from similar standards applied by European agencies.

Until 2011, the decisions of SCQ for the accreditation of HEIs and their programs had to be formally approved by the Government of the Republic of Kosovo. With the approval of

the new Higher Education Law in 2011, this practice was discontinued and the SCQ itself became the final decision-making authority for accreditation.

From 2009 onwards, the number of private higher education institutions decreased, while the number of public universities began to increase. In addition to the University of Pristina, until 2014, the Government of the Republic of Kosovo established six other regional universities. As a result of the lack of human resources and fully developed processes, KAA was initially unable to fully implement all the requirements of the Administrative Instruction for Accreditation of HEIs in Kosovo, especially the requirements related to the qualification and number of academic staff. This often-allowed applicants to use the academic credentials of the same persons to reach a positive accreditation decision for several programmes, resulting in the extraordinary growth of study programs.

To address these challenges, KAA consolidated the accreditation process through the completion of legal acts and review of accreditation standards by adapting them more to the context of Kosovo and by making them more resilient against practices such as double-reporting academic staff. The accreditation procedure was re-designed in a two-step approach to enable the KAA to first verify formal criteria (e.g. availability of the minimum number of academic staff) before initiating the external evaluation with international experts. KAA gradually increased the number of administrative staff, took measures to improve the review of HEIs' self-evaluation documentation, and improved the external evaluation process. In this regard, an important role was the collection of data through the digital platforms of the KAA, which made the verification of the criteria defined in the AI for Accreditation significantly more efficient and reliable.

In addition to the accreditation process, KAA was also engaged in operationalizing other components, such as follow-up procedures and appeal procedures. KAA strategically used the projects of external donors who, through international expertise, supported the revision of standards and guidelines. Besides considering the needs and developments of the higher education system in Kosovo, the standards and guidelines for external evaluation procedures were harmonized with the ESG, which were a prerequisite for increasing the international recognition of academic degrees issued in Kosovo.

Since its establishment, KAA was committed to gaining membership and actively engage in international organizations and networks such as ENQA, CEENQA, INQAAHE, etc., and to demonstrate its compliance with the ESG by registration on EQAR. KAA became a member of ENQA in 2014 and registered on EQAR in 2015. However, following interference from the political level, infringing on the agency's independence, KAA was excluded from EQAR in 2018 and from ENQA in 2019.

In June 2023, the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo adopted the Law on KAA, which consolidates KAA's independent status as a regulatory agency in the Republic of Kosovo and contains a number of basic provisions regarding its work, e.g. the types of

accreditations and the main areas the standards need to cover. While the Law on Higher Education remains unchanged, the more general provisions on accreditation and KAA therein have now been superseded by the more specific provisions in the Law on KAA.

Regarding internationalization, AKA regularly engages in participation in quality assurance forums and activities organized by ENQA, INQAHE, etc. In recent years, KAA has also made various visits to European quality assurance agencies to exchange good practices of external evaluation processes such as in Austria, Germany, Montenegro, visits to the ENIC NARIC of Czech Republic, etc. KAA staff have also participated in staff development programs such as in ASIIN in Germany. It is also very important to mention the twinning project between the Accreditation Agencies of Kosovo and Austria. The Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) and the Austrian counterpart Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation, with the support of the Heras Plus project, funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) have launched the twinning project. The twinning project aims at the exchange of Austrian experiences for the KAA, through mutual visits, conferences, training, and consulting in the field of ESG standards implementation. KAA staff will visit the Austrian Accreditation Agency and the Austrian partners will also visit Kosovo, where they will exchange experiences and best practices of institution management, process management, quality assurance, and supervision of results.

KAA has benefited from international expertise through the projects funded by ADA (Austrian Development Agency) and implemented by consortiums of organizations such as WUS Austria and ORCA for reviewing its policies and regulations. ADA funded projects include QAINT (The Quality, Accountability, Integrity, and Transparency in Higher Education Project – QAINT), HERAS+ (Higher Education Research and Applied Science Plus), and HEI25 (Higher Education Intervention 2025).

➢ QAINT was a project aimed at aligning the Kosovo higher education system with the international standards of quality, transparency, integrity, and accountability. It was implemented for three years (2019-2022) and its main targeted group was KAA. KAA benefited from the expertise through QAINT for the drafting of the KAA Follow-Up and Monitoring Methodology and drafting of the Regulation on Organization and Systematization of Jobs. QAINT supported also KAA by international expertise for the major workshops KAA held throughout the period of 2019-2022.

➢ HERAS+ is a project that aims at a more competitive and diversified public higher education and research sector in Kosovo in line with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). KAA was the main beneficiary from the HERAS+. It supported the drafting of the KAA strategic plan, the drafting of the Standards for the Evaluation of Doctoral Programs, etc. Most recently, HERAS+ supported KAA with international expertise for the revision of the Accreditation Manual and the accreditation standards for institutional evaluation and program evaluation.

➢ HEI25 is a project that aims to support KAA as its main beneficiary. Its first output is increased usage of digital services and workflows by the KAA and improved credibility of the accreditation process. Through HEI25, KAA drafted a needs assessment through which it identified the gaps in its work processes and identified solutions for improving work processes through digitalization. HEI25 has also supported KAA with digital software equipment which have contributed significantly to the efficiency of the KAA's work.

3.2. Profile of the agency

The Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) is an independent regulatory agency responsible for external quality assurance, including accreditation, re-accreditation, monitoring, validation and all other external quality assurance processes of higher education institutions and their study programs in the Republic of Kosovo, in accordance with international best practices, including in particular the relevant European standards in the field of quality assurance in higher education.

The mission of KAA is "through the accreditation process, to support the development of quality in Higher Education Institutions and assure the society of Kosovo that the quality of teaching and learning is at the level of international standards".

The goals that stem from the mission statement of the agency are the following:

➢ to promote, improve and enhance the quality of higher education;
➢ to increase transparency and accountability in the higher education system;
➢ to improve the quality of studies in higher education institutions;
➢ to encourage innovative content in higher education;
➢ ensure the comparability of qualifications from Kosovo higher education institutions internationally;
➢ contribute the objective of integration of Kosovo in the European Higher Education Area.

The values that guide the work of KAA are independence, transparency, credibility, and professionalism.

KAA is independent in drafting and approving its detailed rules, procedures and criteria for accreditation, reaccreditation, validation, external evaluation, quality control, monitoring and selection of international experts, within the overarching stipulations of the Law on Higher Education, the Law on KAA and the Administrative Instruction (AI) on Accreditation. Additionally, it drafts and develops the strategic plan of the agency, including the budget planning and execution in accordance with the applicable laws. KAA is responsible to cooperate with MESTI regarding the issuance, amendment, restriction or revocation of licenses. KAA prepares annual reports on the activities related to accreditation decisions.

KAA comprises the State Council of Quality (SCQ), the KAA Director and administration, and the Appeals Committee.

In line with the national legislation, the SCQ is a collegial decision-making body that ensures the quality of higher education and is independent in exercising its competencies. It acts as the Board of KAA. The State Council of Quality consists of nine (9) members, three of whom are international. According to the new Law on KAA among the nine members, the SCQ shall comprise a student member with the right to vote. The law further defines that besides the Director of KAA, who is an ex officio member of the SCQ, the SCQ shall include two industry representatives as non-voting members.

The SCQ is led by its president, who is elected with the majority of votes of all voting members. The president is elected from amongst the local academic members. According to the Law, the president is responsible for leading the SCQ's work, convening and chairing meetings, signing decisions and other documents adopted by the SCQ, representing the SCQ in its national and international activities, etc.

SCQ members are proposed by the Ministry of Education from a shortlist established by a selection commission, including the major stakeholders and civil society, based on an open call and specific requirements stipulated in the Law on KAA. Members are appointed by the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo. Their mandate is four (4) years, with the exception of the student member mandate, which shall be (2) years. The current composition of the SCQ is as follows:

➢ Prof. Asoc. Dr. Hasnije Ilazi, President (local academic);
➢ Dr. Klemen Miklavič; Vice President (international);
➢ Prof. Asoc. Dr. Gëzim Tosuni, Member (local academic);
➢ Prof. Asoc. Dr. Maja Martinović, Member (international);
➢ Dr. Jaakko Kauko, Member (international);
➢ Prof. Dr. Mirlinda Batalli, Member (local academic);
➢ Prof. Dr. Avni Berisha, Member (local academic);
➢ Dr. Jetmir Haxhibeqiri, Member (local academic);
➢ Ex officio member, KAA General Director, Naim Gashi

Because the Law on KAA, has entered into force in June 2023, the procedure for the appointment of the student member and two non-voting members from the industry has not yet been initiated. KAA has sent a letter to the Parliament of the Republic of Kosovo based on which it expects the imminent appointment of a student representative to the SCQ by the Parliament.

The Administrative structure of KAA consists of the Director and the administrative staff, who are recruited based on the general national law on the recruitment of public officials. KAA currently employs 18 administrative officers, of which nine (9) are tasked with the

evaluation and follow-up procedures (an increase of seven (7) employees compared to 5 years ago), three (3) work in the finance, two (2) in the legal issues, two (2) in the administration, and one (1) IT who supports the digitalization of the agency. KAA plans to employ another 12 persons in accordance with its strategic plan and objectives. The increase in the number of employees from 10 in 2018 to 18 currently and subsequently to 32 by the end of September 2024 represents an incremental growth of KAA's capacities in human resources, which shall contribute to the quality of its services.

4. Activities of KAA

The primary responsibilities of KAA, according to the Law on KAA, are:

- Accreditation and re-accreditation of institutions;
- Accreditation and re-accreditation of programs of higher education institutions; including online and distance programs, programs offered in foreign languages, joint programs and dual diploma programs;
- Validation of international accredited institutions and programs;
- Follow-up and monitoring of institutions of higher education;
- Continuous quality control and advancement in accredited institutions and their study programs;

KAA's main external quality assurance activity is the periodic (re-) accreditation process conducted at institutional and study program levels. The accreditation process begins with the application, which needs to be submitted to KAA at least one year before the envisaged beginning of the accreditation period, or at least one year before expiry of the current accreditation, respectively. Applications, as a first step, are reviewed and accepted by SCQ based on the formal criteria related to the required qualifications and scientific record of academic staff. Following the formal acceptance of the application, HEIs are invited to submit their full self-evaluation documentation for KAA to proceed with the arrangement of the site visit, conducted with international experts who produce a review report. The accreditation process is completed with a decision by SCQ, based on the experts' review report. Where HEIs are dissatisfied with the final outcome of the accreditation process, they are entitled to file an appeal to the Appeals Committee of KAA.

Institutional accreditation is a formal quality assessment process that determines the official recognition status granted by the KAA for the institution of higher education. Obtaining institutional accreditation is obligatory for all higher education institutions operating in the territory of the Republic of Kosovo to develop academic activity. Institutional accreditation includes the general right to award qualifications for a certain period.

Program accreditation is a formal process of quality assessment, which determines the official status of recognition granted by the KAA to Bachelor or Master programmes, which enables the higher education institution to award qualifications for the relevant field within a certain period of time. Study program accreditation is also obligatory for all higher education institutions willing to issue a degree in the territory of the Republic of Kosovo.
Evaluation of Doctoral Programmes is a formal process of quality assessment, which determines the official status of recognition granted by KAA, which enables the higher education institution to award PhD qualifications for the relevant field within a certain period of time.

Monitoring procedures – The KAA develops monitoring procedures which aim to verify and confirm whether the given conditions of accreditation as well as the standards of the Accreditation Manual continue to be applied by the accredited higher education institutions. These procedures are implemented at the institutional level and/or at the level of study programs and are not duplicated by the follow-up procedure which focuses only on fulfilling the recommendations given in the external evaluation reports.

An overview of the applications and their formal acceptance in the last three years is presented below:

	2021		2022		2023	
	public	private	public	private	public	private
Applications for institutional accreditation	-	6	1	16	5	7
accepted for review	-	6	1	16	5	7
not accepted	-	-	-	-	-	-
Applications for programme accreditation – Bachelor	89	100	35	72	17	43
accepted for review	73	72	32	40	13	21
not accepted	16	28	3	32	4	22
Applications for programme accreditation – Master	75	40	42	36	32	25
accepted for review	63	26	29	25	21	13
not accepted	12	14	13	11	11	12
Applications for programme accreditation – PhD	5	-	5	1	2	-
accepted for review	5	-	5	-	2	-
not accepted	-	-	-	1	-	-

An overview of the accreditation process conducted in the last three years is presented below:

	2021		2022		2023	
	public	private	public	Private	Public	Private
Evaluations in institutional level	-	6	1	13	5	5
resulted in positive decision	-	3	1	11	4	3
resulted in negative decision	-	3	-	2	1	2
withdrawn	-	-	-	3	-	2
Evaluations for programme accreditation – Bachelor	73	72	32	36	13	17
resulted in positive decision	71	54	30	34	13	15
resulted in negative decision	2	11	2	2	-	2
withdrawn	-	7	-	4	-	4
Evaluations for programme accreditation – Master	63	26	29		21	13
resulted in positive decision	53	20	27	22	19	9
resulted in negative decision	10	4	2	-	2	4
withdrawn	-	2	-	3	-	-

Evaluations for programme accreditation – PhD	5	-	5	-	2	-
resulted in positive decision	1	-	2	-	2	-
resulted in negative decision	4	-	3	-	-	-
withdraw	-	-	-	-	-	-

NB: The number of accreditation processes in a year can be smaller than the number of accepted applications in case the application was accepted in one year, while the evaluation process only took place in the next year.

An overview of the expert panels engaged in the last three years is presented below:

	2021	2022	2023
Experts involved, institutional	21	28	20
Experts involved, programs	236	139	150
Student experts involved	105	94	108

Based on the laws in force, KAA can also recognize international accreditation of HEIs that operate within the territory of the Republic of Kosovo if their diplomas are subject to verification by MEST. All higher education institutions that opt for an external evaluation at the institutional or study program level by an international accreditation agency must apply for recognition at the KAA. Likewise, if an institution accredited by KAA, in cooperation with an international partner university, decides to offer in Kosovo study programs accredited by the relevant accreditation agency in their country of origin, these accreditations need to be recognized by KAA. In each case, KAA decides to recognize international accreditation only if the respective accreditation agencies are registered on EQAR, recognised by the US Department of Education (USDE) or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

5. Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) Part II

5.1. Consideration of internal quality assurance

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

KAA conducts accreditation process based on predefined standards which aim among others to consolidate the internal quality assurance systems at institutional level and support the higher education institutions in the quality enhancement and continuous development of their operations. To this end the accreditation process is designed to supporting higher education transform itself through the implementation of reforms and the increasing awareness of the importance of quality and quality assurance.

1. Institutional accreditation

The institutional accreditation process is obligatory for all higher education institutions operating in the territory of the Republic of Kosovo. It enables the development of academic activity and the right to award qualifications for a certain period. Institutional accreditation focuses on certifying the compliance of education providers against the standards of institutional accreditation. These focus on whether the institution has adequate general processes and resources in place to develop and deliver quality higher education, and are organized in the following general areas:

- Public mission and institutional objectives
- Strategic planning, governance, and administration
- Financial planning and management
- Academic integrity and public accountability
- Quality management
- Learning and teaching
- Research
- Staff, employment processes, and professional development
- Student administration and support services
- Learning resources and facilities
- Institutional cooperation

An elaboration of the requirements of the standards for institutional accreditation for each general area against ESG Part 1 is provided below:

ESG Part I	General areas of KAA Standards for Institutional accreditation
1.1. Policy for Quality Assurance	General Area 1) Institutional Mission and Objectives; General Area 2) Strategic Planning, governance and administration; General Area 4) Academic Integrity, responsibility and public accountability; General Area 5) Quality Management;

Accreditation at the institutional level focuses on the mission and vision of HEIs and the institutional objectives. It requires the HEIs to have clear and measurable mission statements defined and agreed upon by the academic community members.

The institutional accreditation process focuses on the internal quality system of higher education institutions. HEIs must have institutional policies for QA and a dedicated unit to implement internal quality assurance processes. All accredited HEIs in Kosovo have established Quality Assurance Offices or have assigned responsibilities to a designated person. The primary QA exercise is the student questionnaires, and they are regularly implemented to assess teaching, administrative support, and infrastructure, typically on a semester basis.

Some of the HEIs publish internal evaluation results and reports on their websites. In addition, KAA believes that in line with the accreditation standards, HEIs need to ensure that reports on the overall quality of the programs are prepared periodically and that they are not only produced for accreditation purposes. Further, it considers that HEIs still need to ensure that besides students and academic staff, graduates and employers are also systematically used in quality assessments of HEIs.

Regarding student involvement, KAA considers that it has substantially influenced the increase of student involvement at every decision-making and consultative body of all institutions of higher education in Kosovo. Whereas the statutes of public universities sometimes allow students to vote only on student issues, KAA has advocated for alternatives and ensuring the full right to vote for students for all operations of the universities. Program accreditation (Ba/Ma as well as PhD) build on this, as all institutions undergoing program accreditation will have passed an institutional accreditation already. For this purpose, in addition to the accreditation standards, KAA has produced research reports and specific guidelines that aim to strengthen student involvement in internal quality assurance processes and policy-making and decision-making bodies of HEIs.

1.2. Design and Approval of Programs	General Area 5) Quality Management; General Area 6) Teaching and Learning; General Area 7) Research

The accreditation standards at the institutional level address the design and approval of study programs. HEIs must have defined procedures for the drafting of curricula and structures in place that are responsible for approving the opening of new programs. Accreditation standards require that relevant academic and professional advice is considered when defining the intended learning outcomes of the study programs. Also, standards require that learning outcomes are based on knowledge, skills, and competencies.

With the implementation of the Accreditation Manual, respectively, standards for BA and MA programs, KAA considers that positive developments are noted regarding the involvement of students and academic staff members in curricula design. While HEIs have made progress toward establishing communication channels with industry representatives for program design, KAA still considers that substantial work needs to be done with regard to formalizing the communication between HEIs and external stakeholders. Notable progress has been made in relation to the establishment of advisory bodies at institutional levels who provide feedback about the quality of graduates in the labor marked vis a vis the marked needs.

1.3. Student Centred Learning – Teaching and Assessment	General Area 6) Teaching and Learning

The standard requires that HEIs organize their teaching and learning activities based on a student-centred approach. It requires HEIs to have effective systems in place for ensures that programs meet high standards of learning and teaching though initial approvals, regular changes and monitoring of performances. The standards requires that

study programs are learning outcomes based, the learning outcomes are consistent with the NQF descriptors, that HEIs have adequate staff for the delivery of study programs, and that regularly assess the effectiveness of teaching and assessment methods.

KAA has noticed that overall HEIs have improved the learning methods and environments to become more student-centred and stimulate student's motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process. However, KAA considers that more work needs to be done with regards to formulation of learning outcomes and their assessment in order to ensure that assessments methods adequately assess the achievement of the learning outcomes.

1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	General Area 9) Student administration and support services

Processes regarding student admission, progression and certification are covered generally in institutional accreditation standards, but in most detail at the program level.

HEIs are required to have transparent and clear admission procedures in place and ensure that these procedures are conducted fairly. The standards also require HEIs to provide student feedback on their performance and results and provide additional assistance if needed, to support student's progress. Likewise, institutions are required to have flexible treatment of students in special situations with respect to deadlines and formal requirements in the program and to all examinations.

A particularly positive development noted by KAA is the increased information provided by HEIs for students on the regulations and other teaching and learning aspects covering all phases of the student life cycle. Most HEIs have drafted and disseminated Student Handbooks and made them available to students upon enrolment. Whereas increased attention to the management of progression data by HEIs is also noticed, KAA considers that more work is needed to have formal arrangements in place to collect and manage student progression.

1.5. Teaching Staff	General Area 8) Staff, employment, promotion process and professional development General Area 7) Research

The presence of sufficient and highly qualified teaching staff is a key element of the Kosovo accreditation system and hence covered at both levels.

As part of the institutional accreditation process, HEIs demonstrate that they have staff development plans that formally support academic staff members in publishing papers, participating in international scientific conferences, involving students in research works, and involving research results in the study program contents.

KAA has further specified requirements for staff through an SCQ decision: full-time staff of HEIs, whom the SCQ verifies during the formal application process, are required to have papers published in Scopus and WoS platforms. The decision has subsequently increased the level of research background of academic staff.

At the study program level, the formal criteria (minimum number of staff) are checked by the SCQ at the application stage. Accreditation standards for the study programs focus on the workload of academic staff, availability of academic staff for the student groups, coverage of disciplines within the curricula, opportunities for additional professional development, assessment of academic staff, etc.

While substantial progress is made with regards to the availability of full-time staff, KAA considers that HEIs need to have more formalised procedures in place for staff development. In addition, KAA considers that HEIs have substantially improved the assessment procedures of academic staff.

1.6. Learning resources and student support	General Area 2) Strategic Planning, governance and administration; General Area 3) Financial Planning and Financial management; General Area 9) Student administration and support services;

	General Area 10) Facilities and learning resources.

The institutional accreditation standards focus on the overall strategic and financial planning in regard to learning resources and student support.

The specific infrastructure and learning resources in place for each study program are assessed primarily in program accreditation. The assessment includes aspects such as libraries, online subscriptions, laboratories, software, reading rooms, etc. The standards also require HEIs to have infrastructure and facilities dedicated adapted to students with special needs.

KAA has noticed substantial improvements in learning infrastructure and the expansion of student support services, with particular attention to academic counselling. Catering to students with special needs is the area in which KAA considers that most work still remains to be done in this respect.

1.7. Information Management	General Area 5) Quality Management

Regarding information management, HEIs must have statistical data in accessible central databases that are used to prepare reports on indicators and other tasks in monitoring quality. This is primarily addressed in the standards related to quality management at institutional and program level.

While the number of data collection tools has increased, KAA recognizes that HEIs need to do more actually to use those data for quality improvement processes. Also, data need to better be used to inform policies and strategic developments of the HEIs.

1.8. Public information	General Area 4) Academic Integrity, responsibility and public accountability

The provision of public information is addressed in the institutional accreditation process. HEIs must publish accessible and detailed information regarding their academic and research activities, including detailed information about the study programs, learning outcomes, course descriptions, study conditions, etc.

KAA considers that substantial progress has been made about public information. However, it considers that more information needs to be published about the final projects of students or theses and information about the student evaluation results.

1.9. Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes	General Area 5) Quality Management; General Area 6) Teaching and Learning;

KAA institutional accreditation standards address the ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programs. Institutions are requested to involve students and other stakeholders in reviewing their study programs. Specifically, accreditation standards require that the results of the internal quality assurance system be considered for further development of the study program. This includes evaluation results, investigation of the student workload, academic success, and employment of graduates. Evidence is required during the accreditation process to demonstrate changes implemented due to the reviewing process involving all academic community members.

KAA has noted the number of internal quality assurance mechanisms to monitor the quality of the study programs at HEIs has increased. However, KAA considers that HEIs still need to have increased involvement of staff, graduates and relevant stakeholders when defining the learning outcomes and program objectives.

1.10. Cyclical external quality assurance	According to the applicable legislation into force, all HEIs in Kosovo must undergo an institutional accreditation process at least every 3 to 5 years.

KAA institutional and program accreditations are cyclical. Depending on the validity of the specific institutional and program accreditations, a re-accreditation process takes place at least every 3 to 5 years for each institution and for each of its programs.

2. Program accreditation

The study program accreditation focuses on certifying the compliance of specific study programs developed by education providers against the standards of accreditation for Bachelor/Master programmes, which are organized in the following general areas:

➢ Mission, objectives and administration;
➢ Quality management
➢ Academic staff;
➢ Educational process content;
➢ Students;
➢ Research;
➢ Infrastructure and learning resources.

An elaboration of the requirements of the standards for program accreditation for each general area against ESG Part 1 is provided below:

ESG Part I	General Areas for KAA Standards for program accreditation (Bachelor and Master)
1.1. Policy for Quality Assurance	General Area 1) Mission, objectives and administration General Area 5) Quality Management

Similarly, to the institutional accreditation, quality management is also an important standard that HEIs must fulfil. Quality management at the study program level focuses on the quality assurance processes that deal with all aspects of program planning and delivery, including services and resources provided by the institution. Evidence is required during the program (re-)accreditation process to demonstrate changes implemented due to the reviewing process involving all academic community members. The standard requires that HEIs collect survey data from students, graduates and employers, and that these evaluations are made publicly available.

While KAA considers that quality assurance arrangements have been improved at the study program level, it considers that more work is needed to perform quality assurance procedures that cover the overall quality of study programs. Whereas HEIs procedure SERs for the accreditation purpose, it is very rare that HEIs produce overall quality reports at study program level outside the accreditation process.

1.2. Design and Approval of Programs	General Area 5) Quality Management General Area 4) Educational process content

HEIs are required to have well defined procedures in place for the drafting and approval of study programs and must involve external stakeholder. Study programs are required to be referenced against the NQF respective levels and learning outcomes must be defined in knowledge, skills and competences.

Whereas substantial progress has been made with regards to the drafting of study programs, KAA still considers that HEIs need more work to do with regards to the formulation of learning outcomes.

1.3. Student Centred Learning – Teaching and Assessment	General Area 4) Educational process content

Accreditation standards focus on the teaching, learning and assessment for all programs. It requires HEIs to draft programs that are compliance with the respective NQF descriptors, that programs are learning outcomes based (knowledge, skills and competences), that programs promote a student-teacher relationship in which each assume the responsibilities in reaching the learning outcomes. It also requires HEIs to ensure that teaching strategies are fit for different types of learning outcomes, and they are flexible to meet the needs of different groups pf students. HEIs need to have assessment mechanisms to ensue that assessments are fair and objective and meet the learning outcomes. The standards also focus on the internship and facilitation of practice stages by the HEIs.

Whereas KAA considers that HEIs in Kosovo provide for an environment that is student centered, that students are supported to reach their learning outcomes, have access to different learning resources, are informed in advance about their assessments and requirements to meet the preconditions of the subjects, KAA considers that more work is needed to ensure the appropriateness between learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessments forms for subject level.

1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	General Area 5) Students

Accreditation standards for study program also focus on student admission, progression and certification. HEIs are required to have transparent and clear admission procedures in place and ensure that these procedures are conducted fairly. The standard also requires HEIs to provide student feedback on their performance and results and provide additional assistance if needed, to support students' progress. Likewise, institutions are required to have flexible treatment of students in special situations with respect to deadlines and formal requirements in the program and to all examinations.

1.5. Teaching Staff	General Area 3) Academic staff

Academic staff is also an important standard for the study program level. Besides the formal criteria that are checked by the SCQ on the application stage, accreditation standards for the study program focus on the workload of academic staff, availability of academic staff for the student groups, coverage of disciplines within the curricula, opportunities for additional professional development, assessment of academic staff, etc.

While substantial progress is made with regards to the availability of full-time staff, KAA considers that HEIs need to have more formalised procedures in place for staff development. In addition, KAA considers that HEIs have substantially improved the assessment procedures of academic staff. In line with the accreditation standards, all HEIs have formulated Regulations on Staff Performance. KAA still considers that HEIs need more efforts to consolidate the assessment on staff and not only conduct the procedure to satisfy the accreditation standards.

Research at the study program level is also assessed. Accreditation standards require HEIs to have scientific/applied research objectives which are also reflected in the research development plan of the institution. Institutions need to have clear policies for defining what is recognized as research, support staff for research activities, encourage academic staff to include in their teaching information about their research and scholarly activities that are relevant to courses they teach, etc. As stated in the accreditation standards for institutional accreditation, although all program holders have published papers in SCOPUS and WoS platforms, KAA considers that research still needs to be strengthen at the institutional and study program level across all higher education institutions in Kosovo.

1.6. Learning resources and student support	General Area 1) Mission, objectives and administration General Area 7) Infrastructure

According to the standard at the program level, HEIs need to have infrastructure and learning resources in place for study program accreditation. Libraries, online subscriptions, laboratories, software, reading rooms, etc. are checked at each study program individually. Standards also require HEIs to have infrastructure and facilities dedicated adapted to students with special needs, in which standard KAA considers that HEIs need the most work done with respect to the standard for Infrastructure and Learning Resources. Also, KAA considers that increased access to relevant databases is still needed for HEIs at the program level.

1.7. Information Management	General Area 1) Mission, objectives and administration General Area 5) Quality Management

The accreditation standards at the program level requires that statistical data on indicators, including grade distributions, progression and completion rates are retained in an accessible central database and regularly reviewed and reported in periodic program reports. It also requires that evaluation data with graduates and employers are used to provide evidence about the appropriateness of intended learning outcomes.

While KAA considers that HEIs have been substantial progress with regards to the collection and maintenance of data through digitalized platforms, it considers that HEIs need to better use this data for program review, strategic planning and policy making at the program levels.

1.8. Public information	General Area 1) Mission, objectives and administration General Area 5) Quality Management

Accreditation standards at the program level, require HEIs to publish formal policies, guidelines and regulations dealing with academic issues. It also requires HEIs to publish information with regards to quality assessments with students and other stakeholders.	
Whereas all HEIs have published their internal policies on the webpage and other relevant information with regards to teaching, learning, research it considers that still improvements need to be done with regards to the level of publication of internal quality assurance reports.	
1.9. Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes	General Area 5) Quality Management
KAA addresses the ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programs. In line with accreditation standards, institutions are requested to involve students and other stakeholders in reviewing their study programs. Specifically, accreditation standards require that the results of the internal quality assurance system be considered for further development of the study program. This includes evaluation results, investigation of the student workload, academic success, and employment of graduates. Evidence is required during the accreditation process to demonstrate changes implemented due to the reviewing process involving all academic community members.	
KAA has noted the number of internal quality assurance mechanisms to monitor the quality of the study programs at HEIs has increased. However, it considers that still more work is needed to involve staff, graduates and employers when reviewing the study programs.	
1.10. Cyclical external quality assurance	According to the applicable legislation into force, all HEIs in Kosovo must undergo program accreditation process at least every 3 to 5 years.
KAA institutional and program accreditations are cyclical. Depending on the validity of the specific institutional and program accreditations, a re-accreditation process takes place at least every 3 to 5 years for each institution and for each of its programs.	

3. Evaluation of PhD programs

For the evaluation of PhD Programs, KAA has adopted separate Standards for Evaluation of Doctoral Programmes. Due to the specific nature of Doctoral education, focused more on an individual research topic, these are organized in different general areas than the standards for BA and MA level, addressing:

➢ Institutional structure, administrative support, and funding
➢ Selection and admission criteria
➢ Doctoral programme structure/content
➢ Research environment/capacity
➢ Supervision
➢ Assessment
➢ Doctoral research outcomes

The focus is thus on the specific program(s) under evaluation, their curricula, the teaching methods and the resources, especially academic staff, deployed to these programs.

Standards for Doctoral programs cover seven major components. Each component is divided into two types of standards: Core and Supplementary. While core standards must be met in the process of evaluation, supplementary standards offer other desirable features that reflect good practice followed in many European universities. The Standards for

Doctoral programs assess the institutional structure administrative support and funding, where the HEIs are required to have institutional regulations for doctoral programs, sufficient human, spatial, physical and financial resources to support its doctoral programs and sufficient academic staff with doctoral degrees and research records for the last five years. For the accreditation of doctoral programs, HEIs need to have selection and admission criteria in place and organize the selection process based on competitive and transparent processes. In the selection process, doctoral candidates' potential for research should be assessed. The Standards for Doctoral programs also focus on the doctoral program structure and content, monitoring and supervision of candidates, assessment, etc. HEIs need to demonstrate Research Environment and capacity and to define the Doctoral Research Outcome.

Monitoring procedures are focused on ensuring that higher education institutions and study programs continue to comply with the accreditation standards throughout the period their accreditation is valid. Monitoring procedures do not have separate, specific standards, but they use the standards for Institutional Accreditation, Program Accreditation and Doctoral Programs as reference points.

ESG Part I	General areas of KAA Standards for Institutional accreditation	General Areas for KAA Standards for program accreditation (Bachelor and Master)	Standards for Evaluation of Doctoral Programmes
1.1. Policy for Quality Assurance	Institutional Mission and Objectives; Strategic Planning, governance and administration; Academic Integrity, responsibility and public accountability; Quality Management;	Mission, objectives and administration; Quality Management	Institutional Structure, Administrative Support and Funding (Standard 1)
1.2. Design and Approval of Programs	Quality Management; Teaching and Learning; Research	Quality Management; Educational process content	Doctoral Programme Structure/Content (Standard 3)
1.3. Student Centred Learning – Teaching and Assessment	Teaching and Learning	Educational process content	Assessment (Standard 6)
1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	Student administration and support services	Students	Selection and Admission Criteria (Standard 2); Supervision (Standard 5); 7) Doctoral Research Outcome

1.5. Teaching Staff	Staff, employment, promotion process and professional development Research	Academic staff	Institutional Structure, Administrative Support and Funding (Standard 1);
1.6. Learning resources and student support	Strategic Planning, governance and administration; Financial Planning and Financial management; Student administration and support services; Facilities and learning resources.	Mission, objectives and administration; Infrastructure	Institutional Structure, Administrative Support and Funding (Standard 1); Research environment/ Capacity (Standard 4)
1.7. Information Management	Quality Management	Mission, objectives and administration	
1.8. Public information	Academic Integrity, responsibility and public accountability	Quality Management	Doctoral Research Outcome (Standard 7); Institutional Structure, Administrative Support and Funding (Standard 1);
1.9. Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes	Quality Management; Teaching and Learning;	Quality Management	Doctoral Programme Structure/Content (Standard 3)
1.10. Cyclical external quality assurance	According to the applicable legislation into force, all HEIs in Kosovo must undergo an institutional accreditation process at least every 3 to 5 years.	According to the applicable legislation into force, all program must undergo the program accreditation process at least every 3 to 5 years.	According to the applicable legislation into force, the accreditation period is between three to five years. To this end, study programs at the PhD level must undergo accreditation process at least every 3 to 5 years.

5.2. Designing methodologies fit for purpose

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

The accreditation process is conducted per relevant documents that KAA drafts in cooperation with all members of the academic community in Kosovo. The Accreditation Manual is a document that contains three chapters, respectively:

➢ **Chapter I** which elaborates the context of the quality assurance framework in Kosovo and explains the implementation of the Accreditation Manual (compliance level of each general area, overall compliance, formal requirements with regards to research work of staff, etc).

➢ **Chapter II** defines the Accreditation Standards for Institutional Accreditation and the Standards for Study Program accreditation (BA and MA).

➢ **Chapter III,** Guidelines for External Quality Assessment, elaborate in detail on all phases of the accreditation process: the initiation of the accreditation procedure, the formal approval/acceptance of applications, the conduct of the self-evaluation, the appointment of the international expert panel, the organization of the accreditation site visit, the drafting of the evaluation report, decision-making by SCQ, etc. The Guidelines explicitly explain the role and responsibilities of HEIs, experts, and KAA coordinators in all phases of the process.

The Standards for Evaluation of Doctoral programs are not contained in the Accreditation Manual as they are approved separately from the accreditation standards for Bachelor and Master programs; however, the Guidelines for External Quality Assessment (Chapter III of the Accreditation Manual) apply identically for the evaluation of PhD programs as for the BA and MA programs.

The Manual was initially approved in 2018. It was drafted based on the results of the previous external evaluations conducted by KAA, the latest developments in the higher education sector in Kosovo, and the inputs of higher education institutions collected through a questionnaire. KAA presented the findings of the questionnaire together with the proposal for revising the accreditation standards at a conference in December 2016, which served as a second opportunity for receiving input from higher education institutions and for in-depth discussion with the sector. The final draft of the Accreditation Manual was distributed for public discussion through a structured questionnaire in which HEIs had the opportunity to propose concrete changes or additions to the document.

Implementing the Accreditation Manual from 2018 onwards has significantly improved the accreditation process. KAA considers that the goals of this Manual, which, among others, included verifying the fulfilment of accreditation standards by HEIs, consolidating internal

quality assurance of HEIs, supporting HEIs in enhancing their quality, increasing the quality of student learning outcomes, and improving student experience in HEIs, have been fulfilled to a substantial extent.

KAA aims to implement a regular enhancement of its process. Therefore, since its approval in 2018, it has amended/changed the Accreditation Manual with specific provisions that have aimed at clarifying and improving the application process, which have complemented the formal criteria of academic staff members, and which have affected the calculation of compliance levels. These amendments/changes have taken place in 2021, 2022 and 2024.

In **2021**, the changes/additions of the Accreditation Manual that have affected only Chapter I include:

Revision of the Accreditation Manual with regards to the compliance level for positive accreditation decision for institutional accreditation and study program accreditation. The revision includes the following two provisions:

➢ Standards on evaluation of Higher Education Institutions, Chapter no. 6 related to Learning and teaching, and chapter no. 10 related to Learning resources and facilities are mandatory. No accreditation on institutional level can be granted unless these two (2) chapters has been fulfilled to either substantially or fully compliant level.
➢ Standards on evaluation of Bachelor and Masters study programs, Chapter no 3. related to Academic staff, and chapter no. 7 related to Infrastructure and resources are mandatory. No accreditation of programmes on Bachelor or Master level can be granted unless the two up mentioned chapters has been fulfilled to either substantially or fully compliant level.

SCQ decided to complement the Accreditation Manual with one provision regarding the formal application process of General Medicine study programs. This addition, implies that within the Accreditation Manual a new provision regarding the formal application process of medical program was added, requiring HEIs to have adequate documentation that they have functional clinics and health services that include all areas of general medicine, including hospital services, in order to be able to enter the accreditation process.

SCQ decided to add one additional criterion regarding the institutional accreditation, with regards to the branches. Through this provision, it clearly stated conditions that HEIs need to implement for the branch campuses, with special focus on the number of administrative services provided to students, separate QA arrangement, separate officers for Career Offices, etc.

SQC decided to amend/change the Accreditation Manual by increasing the criteria and requirements for scientific research. Based on the results of the accreditation process, respectively the review reports of expert for institutional and program accreditation, SCQ has assessed that research is one of the fields that struggles to reach substantial compliance

by HEIs, mainly as a result of the lack of clear institutional policies for the development of scientific research or as a lack of awareness of the academic community for credible platforms to publish scientific papers. The decision of the SCQ dated 2021 establishes additional criteria for program holders of Bachelor's and Master's study programs in terms of scientific works, which have begun to be implemented in October 2021, respectively October 2022. The specific provisions added to the Accreditation Manual include:

➤ From October 1, 2021, in addition to the criteria set by the AI for Accreditation, program holders entering the accreditation process at the BA/BSc level must have at least 1 (one) scientific publication indexed by the field of study / program, while in MA/MSc level must have at least 2 (two) scientific publications from the field of study/program in scientific journals indexed as first author or correspondent, according to article 3, point 1.1 WEB OF SCIENCES core collection (SCIE, SSCI and AHCI) or 1.2 SCOPUS, excluding dubious magazines or publishing houses according to AI 01/2018 approved by MESTI.

➤ From October 1, 2022, in addition to the criteria set by the AI for Accreditation, program holders entering the process of accreditation, re-accreditation or validation at the BA / BSc level must have at least the academic title Prof. Ass. and at least 1 (one) scientific publication indexed from the field of study/program, while at the MA/MSc level they must have at least the academic title Prof. Ass. and 2 (two) scientific publications in scientific journals indexed from the field of study/program, as first or correspondent author, according to article 3, point 1.1 WEB OF SCIENCES core collection (SCIE, SSCI and AHCI) or 1.2 SCOPUS, excluding journals or suspicious publishing houses according to AI 01/2018 approved by MESTI.

➤ Exceptions from point 5.1 and 5.2 are the bearers of study/academic programs defined according to Article 26, point 11 of the Law on Higher Education. These programs include academic staff from the fields of arts, or academic staff engaged in professional study programs where scientific research is not required.

The accreditation standards for institutional accreditation and accreditation standards for BA and MA programs (Chapter II of the Accreditation Manual) have remained unchanged until 2023. KAA initiated the evaluation and revision process of the standards in 2021 with the support of donors and international expertise. The experience gained with implementing the standards from 2018 had highlighted some areas for improvement, including identifying some vague criteria that were considered to benefit from better structuring and articulation. The starting point of the evaluation process were two questionnaires to higher education institutions and external evaluators, who were asked to provide comments specifically on the strengths and weaknesses of the accreditation standards. After completing the questionnaires, KAA organized three workshops: an online workshop, which served as the baseline for revising the accreditation standards, and two physical workshops. Based on the results of the questionnaires as well as benchmarking KAA's practice against good European practices, taking into account especially the understanding and implementation of the 2015 version of the ESG, KAA discussed adaptations of the standards with

representatives of HEIs in the two workshops. The revision process of institutional accreditation standards and standards for BA and MA was initiated in 2023. Prior to their approval, KAA conducted a public consultation procedure with HEIs, international accreditation experts, and other external actors. The Standards for Institutional Accreditation and Study Programs 2023 reflect the requirements of the higher education system in Kosovo, align with the level of development of internal quality assurance, and aim to enhance the quality as per European quality standards. The new accreditation standards for BA and MA programs, were approved by SCQ in its 116th meeting held on September 25, 2023. They will become effective from the 2024 – 2025. KAA has uploaded the standards for accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and the accreditation of BA and MA study programmes on its webpage.

Besides the accreditation standards (Chapter II of the Accreditation Manual), following the approval of the KAA Law in 2023, the KAA has reviewed also the Chapter I and Chapter II of the Accreditation Manual. The purpose of this review was to update the introductory part of the Manual with the new legislative framework into force (Law on KAA) as well as updating the provisions regarding the accreditation process with the provisions of the Law on KAA. Whereas no substantive changes were made in the Accreditation Manual, the review process aimed that the Accreditation Manual is fully aligned and updated with the new legislative framework of KAA. The Accreditation Manual was accessible through the webpage for public consultation. The Accreditation Manual update has ended in 2024.

Besides the Accreditation Manual, other documents and regulations governing the KAA's work and external evaluation processes were reviewed. Other documents that have been revised so far include the Work Regulations of the SQC and Appeals Committee, and KAA Regulation on the Systematization of Workplaces. Before their approval by KAA, all the revised documents were distributed for public discussion through the website and electronic addresses to the entire academic spectrum in Kosovo.

To clarify the SCQ's decision-making criteria (during the phase of formal acceptance of the applications) regarding the suitability of the academic and scientific qualifications of program holders against the subject area of the study programs KAA has drafted a document titled Kosovo Subject Area Code. This document intends to help HEIs determine the which of the qualifications of program holders are relevant for the program they are assigned as holders, by clearly specifying the academic and scientific criteria. KAA discussed the document with higher education representatives in Kosovo through a public debate and distributed it for consultation through its web page. All relevant actors were invited to comment on the document's content before its final approval by the SCQ.

Evaluation of Doctoral programs

Given that doctoral programs are specific regarding the requirements for scientific research work, KAA approved the Standards for the Evaluation of Doctoral Programs in 2020. Prior to 2020, KAA conducted the accreditation process of the doctoral programs through a set

of standards, which were drafted and approved by KAA in 2009. Following the approval of the Accreditation Manual in 2018, including the Standards for BA and MA programs, it was evident that standards for the PhD program needed to be revied. For this purpose, KAA benefited from the international donor's project (HERAS+) who supported KAA with expertise for the revision of the standards for doctoral programs. This process was conducted through three workshops that were held with the international experts, KAA staff, members of the SCQ and representatives of all higher education institutions. The rationale for the Standards and the Standards themselves, were presented to representatives of Kosovo higher education institutions in October to December 2019. The resulting feedback has informed the final version of the standards. Further feedback was obtained following the placing of the draft document on the KAA website. This offered all stakeholders the opportunity to comment and make suggestions. The final version of the Standards has been adopted by the State Council of Quality, on 25.06.2020, and put in to force on 25.06.2020.

The Regulation for the Evaluation of Doctoral programs define clear quality criteria for doctoral programs regardless of their field of research. The standards have been drafted based on European policies of doctoral education and best scientific research practices. KAA has implemented these standards for evaluating doctoral programs at the University of Pristina "Hasan Prishtina", the only institution that offers programs at this level.

Monitoring

In the process of continuous improvement of external quality assessments, KAA has established procedures that preserve its mission in line with local legislation and ESG while adapting to the specific local context. One such example is complementing the follow-up procedures with the *monitoring activity*, which has arisen due to the HEIs tendencies to change the accreditation conditions without the awareness of the KAA. While monitoring may not be a typical activity of an external evaluation agency in some countries, the Kosovo context of a dynamic higher education sector with many small, relatively young, and sometimes profit-oriented institutions requires a systematic approach to ensure that accreditation standards are constantly maintained by HEIs in accordance with accreditation decisions. In addition to the "classical" follow-up procedures, the Methodology for Follow-up Procedures and Monitoring also includes remote and field/on-site monitoring that is carried out by the KAA staff. KAA may initiate extraordinary monitoring procedures if KAA becomes aware of a decline in the quality of higher education institutions and their study programs either through anonymous reporting by any stakeholder or if KAA becomes aware that the higher education institution has submitted false information at any stage of the evaluation and accreditation process.

The Methodology for Follow-up and Monitoring was drafted through the support of QAINT project that provided international and local expertise for the drafting of the document. The drafting of the Methodology took place in 2021, included several workshops between KAA staff, members of the SCQ, and international and local experts.

Prior to its approval, in December 2021, the document was published on the website for public consultation.

5.3. ESG - Implementing processes

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include: a self-assessment or equivalent; an external assessment normally including a site visit; a report resulting from the external assessment; a consistent follow-up.

In order to effectively implement its processes, KAA has developed procedures based on best international practice in the quality assurance in higher education. From the very beginning, KAA has been committed to developing its standards and procedures in full compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), by adapting them in the national context.

The accreditation process is regulated and described in the following documents:

➢ Law on KAA, chapter III
➢ Administrative Instruction on Accreditation No. 15/2018, articles 9 and 10
➢ Accreditation Manual: detailed information about the flow of the accreditation procedure.

The accreditation process consists of four major stages described in the following. While there are three different sets of standards (for institutional accreditation, for Ba/Ma programs, for doctoral education), the accreditation process is identical in the three activities.

5.3.1. Application process

HEIs submit their request for accreditation at least one year before the expected date to obtain accreditation. The request for accreditation is compiled based on application forms (First Pages) and includes general information about the institution/study programs to be included in the re/accreditation procedure. At this stage, also a list of academic staff must be submitted for every program holder of the study program according to the template defined by KAA, including a list of publications.

To review applications for study programs, the legislation in force requires that the HEIs appoints persons responsible for the study program (otherwise known as program holders) for each study program. The legislation into force stipulates that a HEI for each group of students and each 60 ECTS of a BA and MA program, must employ at least one lecturer with full-time employment who holds a PhD degree, as well as a nostrification decision in case their studies were completed abroad.

Also, every program holder for a BA study program must have at least one scientific publication published on the SCOPUS or WoS platforms. For a MA study program, every program holder must have at least two scientific publications published on the SCOPUS and WoS platforms.

For PhD study programs, institutions must have at least 5 program holders with a PhD in the research field of the doctoral programme and have at least 3 papers, as first or corresponding author, published in international relevant publications in the last 5 years.

KAA Secretariat verifies all information submitted by the HEIs and provides an assessment against the formal criteria laid down in the national legislation. Application forms and data of academic staff are reviewed by the SCQ to ensure that the minimum criteria included in the law are fulfilled, including but not limited to the minimum numerical criteria for academic staff required by the law, the relevance of the field of study, number of scientific publications, etc.

5.3.2. Self-evaluation

Once the application for accreditation is accepted, the HEI are invited to submit the self-evaluation documentation within 15 working days from the date of the approval of the application by SCQ. The self-evaluation reports (SER) are drafted in line with the guidelines provided under the Accreditation Manual, Chapter 3, *Guidelines for re/accreditation processes*, and are submitted separately for the institutional re-accreditation process and each study program regardless of the level of study (BA. MA, PhD) and the location where the program is offered (main campus or branch). Templates for the drafting of SERs for institutional accreditation and program accreditation are also made available through KAA's website.

5.3.3. External evaluation

Appointment of the expert team
To conduct the accreditation procedure, KAA appoints an international panel of experts which consist of two (2) up to seven (7) external experts depending on the number of study programs being evaluated and the type of evaluation (institutional or programme). All expert panels, whether at institutional or study program level, should include at least one student expert.

Site visit
The site visit allows the expert panels to evaluate the compliance of the HEI against the standards included in the Accreditation Manual (for institutional accreditation and for BA and MA programs) and the Standards for the Evaluation of Doctoral programs (for PhD study programs), to gather reflections from key stakeholders/interviewees and thus to triangulate and validate the evidence provided in the SER. Depending on the size of the institution and the number of study programs, the site visit lasts between one and two days, and meetings take place according to a predefined schedule which is communicated to the

expert panel and the HEIs in advance. Compulsory meetings during the institutional assessment and study program assessment include the following stakeholders: management of the organisation, program holders, teaching staff, students, QA staff, administration, graduates, and employers. In addition, a visit to the facilities the provider is using for its activities is included.

Drafting and approving of the external evaluation report

During the site visit or after the site visit, expert panels might require additional documents that supports them in evaluating the performance of the HEI against the standards included in the Accreditation Manual or the Standards for the Evaluation of Doctoral Programs. The required additional documentation may include only information that has been referred to during the site visit or in the self-evaluation documentation, hence they are delivered within days upon the site visit has ended.

Results of the evaluation are set out in the external evaluation report. The general structure of the Report is provided by the Accreditation Manual and a template is annexed. Timelines for drafting the external review report are agreed collectively on the last day of the site visit among the panel members and are communicated to the HEI.

KAA coordinators validate the evaluation report to ensure that it includes all required information and that the experts' recommendations are fully supported by evidence and arguments included in the body of the report. Where needed, KAA coordinators might require additional communication the expert panel in order to bring the Evaluation Report in line with the KAA guidelines.

The evaluation report is sent to the HEI enabling them to correct any potential factual errors through comments within three (3) working days. At this stage, the institution is not allowed to submit new evidence that has not been already referred to during the site visit or through the self-evaluation report. After receiving the potential comments from the HEI, the expert panel analyses whether any corrections are needed, finalises the reports and submits it for discussion and approval by the State Council of Quality (SCQ).

Decision making

The accreditation procedure is finalised with a final accreditation decision from the SCQ. After judging the evaluation report and based on the expert's recommendations, the SCQ can reach one of the following decisions:

In the case of initial institutional or study program accreditation:

➢ Not to accredit;
➢ Accredit for 3 years.

In the case of institutional or study program re-accreditation:

- ➢ Not to accredit;
- ➢ Accredit for 3 years.
- ➢ Accredit for 5 years.

The Law on KAA and other sub-legal acts recognizes only accreditation or rejection of accreditation. Thus, accreditation with conditions or other forms of accreditation are not recognized within the system.

SCQ decisions elaborate the main criteria used for the decision making, including shortcomings identified by the expert teams that have led to a negative accreditation decision. The SQC decision clearly indicates the accreditation period, the number of students allowed to be enrolled in the respective study program in one academic year, and information about program holders. KAA publishes its decision together with the Evaluation Report on its official website not later than two weeks after the meeting of the State Council of Quality (SCQ).

5.3.4. Follow Up Procedures

Follow-up procedures are elaborated in the KAA Methodology for Follow-up procedures and monitoring. They are limited only to the verification of the recommendations and confirm the extent to which recommendations are fulfilled by the HEI and are not intended to re-evaluate standards of the Accreditation Manual or the Standards for the Evaluation of Doctoral Programs.

The methodology defines the procedure, the deadlines, the necessary documentation for the follow-up procedures, and the communication with HEIs and experts. Initially the methodology defines that after the completion of each accreditation procedure, HEIs shall submit improvement plans to KAA in which they individually address the expert recommendations given in the external evaluation report. The improvement plans are submitted to KAA six month after the accreditation procedure has been completed.

KAA engages an international expert to evaluate the fulfilment of the recommendations and the procedure can be carried out with a physical visit, online visit or remotely (desk based). KAA submits to the international expert the institution's improvement plan, other relevant evidence, if any, the external evaluation report as well as any other document that is necessary to meet the needs of the follow-up procedure. In case KAA or the international expert considers that the verification of the fulfilment of the recommendations cannot be done remotely (desk-based), then KAA can proceed with the organization of a physical or online visit.

The methodology stipulates that KAA organizes the follow-up procedure at least once within the duration of the accreditation of the institutional level and the study program for each accredited institution of higher education in the Republic of Kosovo. However, due to human resource limitations, KAA has yet to assess the fulfilment of recommendations

before the new accreditation period. The KAA reviews the improvement plans and includes them in the accreditation documentation for the expert teams in the following re-accreditation procedure, in which the experts verify their fulfilment by the HEI.

With regards to the monitoring procedure, according to the [KAA Methodology for Follow-up procedures and monitoring](), KAA develops monitoring procedures which aim to verify and confirm whether the given conditions of accreditation as well as the standards of the Accreditation Manual continue to be applied by the accredited higher education institutions and their study programs. These procedures are distinct from the follow-up procedure, which focuses only on fulfilling the recommendations given in the previous external evaluation reports. According to the KAA Methodology for Follow-up procedures and monitoring, monitoring procedures are divided into:

➢ *monitoring of study programs holders*: it is intended to be conducted at least once within six (6) months, and it is performed remotely by the KAA officers. Verification of programs holders is done through the verification of lecture schedule which is required to be made public on the website of the educational provider.

➢ *monitoring of official websites and advertising materials of HEIs*: it is intended to be conducted at least one within six (6) months and it is performed remotely by the KAA officers. The monitoring of HEI websites is done in order to ensure that the information published by HEIs regarding the accreditation of study programs is accurate and does not create confusion among students, parents or society in general.

Since the implementation of the Methodology, KAA staff has regularly conducted the monitoring of study programs and the monitoring of official website and advertising materials of HEIs. Monitoring reports performed by KAA staff are available on the [website]().

Monitoring according to standards of the Accreditation Manual: Monitoring according to the standards of the Accreditation Manual includes but is not limited to:

➢ *monitoring of academic staff*: it is intended to be conducted at least once within six (6) months, and it is performed by the KAA officers remotely or through a physical visit of the KAA with or without notice in the premises of the higher education institution. The monitoring of the academic staff is done to ensure that the higher education institution is offering the study program with the academic staff as presented in the self-assessment report.

➢ *monitoring lecture and exercise schedules*: it is intended to be conducted at least once within six (6) months, and it is performed by the KAA officers remotely or through a physical visit of the KAA with or without notice in the premises of the higher education institution. The monitoring of lecture schedules is done in order to ensure the compliance of the accredited curriculum according to the Self-Assessment Report, according to the Accreditation Manual (compulsory and elective courses, fund of lecture and exercise classes, practical work and the subject holder) with the schedule of lectures and exercises published by the higher education institution.

➤ *monitoring of infrastructure and resources*: it is intended to be conducted at least once within six (6) months, and it is performed by the KAA officers through a physical visit with or without prior notice to the premises of the higher education institution. Monitoring of infrastructure and resources is done in order to ensure that higher education institutions maintain the standards of the Accreditation Manual presented in the Self-Assessment Report, Infrastructure and resources, especially in study programs which include practice and laboratory.

Extraordinary monitoring: includes but is not limited to:

➤ *monitoring initiated after receiving complaints from external parties*: KAA may accept at any time complaints submitted by individuals or organizations which indicate a decline in the quality of higher education institutions and/or their study programs. In case the SCQ considers that the complaint submitted to the KAA is credible and justified, then the SCQ requests from the relevant institution to submit a report within a certain period of time which presents its position towards the submitted complaint. The SCQ in the next regular meeting, reviews the report of the institution. If the SCQ considers that the reasoning of the institution is well-founded and that the institution has not suffered a decline in quality, the SCQ does not initiate proceedings against the institution. If the SCQ considers that the reasoning of the institution is unfounded, the SCQ formally requests from the institution the improvement of the situation within a time limit which is determined by the SCQ and/or the organization of a monitoring visit by the KAA officials

➤ *Submission of false evidence to the KAA*: In case the KAA becomes aware that, in order to decide on accreditation, re-accreditation or validation, the higher education institution has submitted false information at any stage of the evaluation and accreditation process, the KAA officially notifies the SCQ at the next meeting. In case the SCQ considers that the notification of the KAA is grounded, then the SCQ requests from the relevant institution that within a certain period of time to submit a report which presents its position towards the notification of the KAA.

➤ *Monitoring in cooperation with the Education Inspectorate of MESTI*: The KAA may have a request from the Education Inspectorate of MESTI to conduct a physical monitoring visit to accredited higher education institution in the Republic of Kosovo. Such monitoring visits, in which KAA officials participate, are limited to verifying the technical conditions given for accreditation

It is worth mentioning that in all procedures elaborated above, the KAA Methodology provides continuous communication between the education provider and the KAA. For each monitoring procedure, KAA requests from the institution a written justification in order for the institution to make an official statement regarding its position on the initiated procedure. Likewise, the institutions are given time to complement/improve the documentation such as for example replace the program holders provided that they meet the formal criteria as defined in the national law. The SCQ cannot reach any formal

outcome with respect to the monitoring procedures, without the prior involvement of the education provider in the procedure.

Since the implementation of the Methodology, KAA staff has conducted several monitoring visits to the higher education institutions to monitor the academic staff, the lecture and exercise schedules and monitor the infrastructure and resources of the HEIs. According to the Methodology, for each monitoring procedure performed, it is required to draft a monitoring report. Until now, for each performed monitoring procedure, KAA officials have drafted monitoring reports which are available on the website.

5.4. Peer-review experts

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s)

KAA has traditionally engaged only international experts in its accreditation procedures. Kosovo's higher education was characterized by a lack of awareness among HEIs of the purposes of external quality assessments according to the European perspective. To this end, the lack of professionals with experience in external assessments, the probability of interference in the objectivity of the evaluations, and the competition between the educational providers were considered the determining factors for the establishment of an assessment model with international expertise.

The engagement of international experts has been a key feature of the system, widely supported by stakeholders and provided invaluable expertise to KAA in reaching accreditation decisions that are in line with the national quality criteria. In addition, international experts have contributed to the quality improvement of HEIs through their recommendations, which are based on best international practices. Given the relatively limited access to international developments, the engagement of international experts has helped higher education institutions gain visibility on international developments and trends in higher education and quality assurance practices. More importantly, considering the national context, which consists of a small academic community, the usage of international expertise has enabled KAA to maintain a fair and objective level of assessment.

As stated below, the accreditation process is carried out exclusively by international experts who are selected by KAA based on pre-defined criteria and transparent procedures. Regulations on the appointment of international experts are part of:

➢ Law on Higher Education, article 15, paragraph 8: "*Quality assessment of programs of accredited providers of higher education shall be conducted from KAA for each program within the cycle time that lasts no more than 5 years, KAA appoints international expert panels of relevant fields*"

- ➤ Law on KAA, article 32, External Assessment, paragraph 1: "*KAA arranges the accreditation process for the higher education institutions, based on an external review which is conducted by international experts*"
- ➤ Administrative Instruction on Accreditation of HEIs No. 15/2018: criteria for the selection of the experts, the composition of panel teams, as well as the duties and responsibilities.

In February 2024, KAA adopted a Regulation on the Selection, Engagement and Compensation Procedures of External Experts. The Regulation incorporates provisions which have already been applied by KAA in line with the Administrative Instruction on Accreditation No. 15/2018, but which are harmonized with the new Law on KAA. To this end, the Regulation adds further clarity on the overall selection procedure of expert panels and their involvement in the external evaluation procedures.

The regulation also introduces two main novelties that are important to highlight:

a) *Confirmation of the panel members by the SCQ* - until recently it was the responsibility of the Director to appoint the expert panels based on the pool of experts, which was approved by the SQC. The Regulation envisages that KAA Director proposes the composition of each expert panel to the SCQ. The SCQ shall confirm the proposed panel members or require changes to the panel composition based on, but not limited to, reasonable doubts regarding the integrity of the process.

b) *Gathering feedback from international experts* - while KAA has previously collected some qualitative feedback by international experts during the site visits, the Regulation envisages that KAA establishes a procedure to systematically collect feedback from experts at the end of the evaluation procedure. In line with the KAA's internal quality assurance policy, this feedback will serve to quality improvements at KAA. The format and deadlines for the feedback of international experts is further explained under the KAA Internal QA Procedure.

Selection process of international experts
KAA maintains a list of international experts (referred to as the pool of experts), which is regularly revised. The list consists of 189 experts from various fields of study, including QA professionals and students. They come from European countries such as Croatia (42), Germany (14), Rumania (13), Austria (10) Georgia (9), etc. The list of experts is maintained in an electronic database of KAA, which is gradually becoming part of the e-Akreditimi platform. Data about experts, including the history of their engagement in Kosovo HEIs, are continuously recorded and kept up to date.

KAA updates its list of international experts yearly based on a public call for the nomination of experts published on in its website. The call includes information on the requirements, selection criteria, the responsibilities, renumeration, practical arrangements, etc.

The calls for experts are also disseminated by other agency websites, including ENQA. KAA also seeks to receive recommendations by ENQA members and EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies, and of international experts individually who are interested to become part of the KAA's pool. Student experts are recommended by the ESU.

Interested candidates are invited to fill out an application form, send a CV and list of publications. All nominations received are individually reviewed by the KAA administration in line with the criteria established in the legislation.

The Director of KAA reviews the list of international experts and proposes their approval to the SCQ on yearly basis. Only the list of international experts approved by the SCQ may be used to appoint expert panels for study program or institutional assessments.

Qualifications and criteria for international experts
According to the legislation, the criteria to be met by international experts, include the following:

➢ Be professional in the respective area of assessment and have experience in quality assessment processes and accreditation.
➢ Hold a Ph.D. degree. A Ph.D. degree is not required for student experts, whose qualification may be a BA or MA degree.
➢ Have knowledge and experience of university teaching in the relevant field, except in cases of student experts.
➢ Have scientific research in the relevant field and knowledge about scientific research activities.
➢ Have experience in quality management and quality assurance in a higher education institution.
➢ Have work experience within the organisational and administrative structures of an institution or knowledge about management systems.
➢ Have experience in developing, implementing, and assessing curricula.

On the other side, the student expert member should be an active student and have the fundamental knowledge in higher education quality assurance.

Composition of the expert panels
According to article 32, paragraph 1.1 and 1.2. of the Law on KAA, each expert panel consist of two (2) to seven (7) experts, depending on the number of study programs under review. Each expert panel should also include at least one (1) student member. For institutional accreditation of a higher education institution, KAA engages three expert panel members, one of them being a student. For one program accreditation of a higher education institution, KAA engages minimum three panel members, one of them being a student. The profile of experts engaged in the panels are academic persons with academic Ph. D.s in various fields of study. For program accreditation, KAA selects the profile of the expert panels in accordance with their field of study and the profile of the study program under

evaluation (natural sciences, social sciences, arts, etc). For institutional assessment, KAA can also engage quality assurance professionals who have a PhD academic degree. Until now, KAA has not included industry representatives in the expert panels.

In certain cases, a panel of three experts can also evaluate two study programs if they are of a similar field of study or two levels of study (BA and MA program of the same field). Experts can be invited to evaluate similar study programs across different higher education institutions. Importantly, this doesn't imply that the experts are involved in a combined or clustered assessment procedure.

The appointment of the expert panels takes place once the applications for accreditation have been formally accepted by the SCQ. KAA Secretariat consults the HEIs on the preferred dates for the site visit. According to the new Regulation on the Selection of Experts, the KAA Director proposes the composition of the expert panel to SCQ. The SCQ members have three days to argue and object the proposed member. If SCQ members present and motivate the objection, the final decision on rejection is given within five days. If no active opposition or rejection comes from the SCQ, the proposed Expert Panel composition is considered as approved.

After the SCQ confirms the expert panel, the KAA Secretariat submits the information on the composition of the Expert Panel to the higher education institution.

The educational provider is entitled to object the composition of the expert team. The team composition can be modified if the HEI has solid reasons to believe that the objectivity and professionalism of the evaluation process might be affected. According to the [Regulation on composition of the expert teams](#) and the Accreditation Manual, the HEI should formally address the SCQ to change the composition of the expert panel and justify its request. Based on the rationale of the request, the SCQ shall decide whether to change the expert panel or to reject the provider's request.

 Online training was introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic when the accreditation process shifted online and was maintained as a useful practice afterwards. Online training allows KAA to conduct training in larger groups and mainly focus on sharing general information about the Kosovo's higher education system, the national context (including information about the social, economic, political factors in Kosovo), the quality assurance framework, the size and number of HEIs, accreditation criteria and procedures, etc. Whereas training and briefing of expert panel one day before the site visit, focus only on the self-evaluation documentation of the educational provided under review. These meetings enable the panel members to know each other and share first impressions about the self-evaluation documentation of the provider. In this meeting, panel members usually agree what are the areas of assessment that need more attention and identify the potential concerns. Panel members also tentatively share the standards to be assessed and also the timelines needed to complete the review report.

A [Manual on External Assessment Procedures of Higher Education Institutions](#) is made available for the international experts.

No Conflict of Interest and Incompatibility for members of the expert panel

In the recent discussions, the SCQ is particularly sensitive regarding the integrity in the process of the external evaluations, especially the Expert Panel selection. During informal internal evaluations of the KAA work, the KAA staff and SCQ conducted extensive discussions and jointly elaborated new measures to ensure checks-and-balances in the selection procedures and high standards with regard to integrity. The new measures supporting integrity are reflected in the [Regulation on the Selection, Engagement and Compensation Procedures of External Experts](#) adopted in 2024.

According to the Regulation an expert is incompatible to become part of the expert panel if:

➢ an expert is/was under any other type of contract or agreement with the evaluated higher education institution at the time of the evaluation procedure, or in the last 5 years counting of the day of appointment;
➢ an expert participates or has participated, in any capacity, in a project carried out or involving the evaluated higher education institution between time period starting from five years from the day of appointment until the time of the evaluation procedure;
➢ an expert is/has in the last 5 years been a member of management, professional or advisory bodies of the evaluated higher education institution;
➢ an expert personally collaborates in joint academic and/or research activities
➢ with the staff member of the evaluated higher education institution or unit;
➢ an expert is a student or a graduate of the evaluated HEI.

Also, according to the [Regulation](#), the external experts must guarantee they are not in incompatibility, by signing an Incompatibility and Ethical Statement.

KAA considers that ideally the external evaluation panels of experts would have to be selected with the "random" selection method or through designated selection bodies. However, this will be possible and feasible when the list of experts will be large enough and experts from all academic fields will be well represented.

According to the Methodology for Follow-up Procedures and Monitoring, KAA engages an international expert in the follow-up step to evaluate the fulfilment of the recommendations. KAA might invite the same international expert who has been involved before in the procedure or another expert. In case of engagement of another international expert, the KAA provides all contextual information about the institution and/or study program.

With regards to monitoring procedures, in any of its forms, monitoring is carried out by the KAA officials and in only specific circumstances can seek assistance of a third party, such as an expert or a team of international accreditation experts.

➢ General Monitoring (monitoring of study program holders, monitoring of official website and advertising materials of HEIs) is performed by KAA officials.

➢ Monitoring according to Standards of the Accreditation Manual (monitoring of academic staff, monitoring lecture and exercise schedules, monitoring of infrastructure and resource) is also performed by KAA officials. However, in case of monitoring of infrastructure, KAA may seek the assistance of a third party, such as an expert and/or team of international accreditation experts, to verify laboratory equipment which may be unknown to KAA officials. In this case, the selection and appointment procedure are done through the KAA's expert pool and through the approval by the SCQ.

➢ Extraordinary monitoring (monitoring initiated after receiving complaints from external parties, submission of false evidence to the KAA, monitoring in cooperation with the Education Inspectorate) are performed by KAA officials.

5.5. Criteria for outcomes

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

KAA bases outcomes of the accreditation process on prearranged, clearly defined, and published criteria in order to ensure the fairness, reliability and consistency of external evaluation procedures. The development and establishment of all external evaluation procedures are carried out with the active participation of stakeholders.

Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions in Kosovo is performed based on the criteria which are set on three main documents:
1. Law on Kosovo Accreditation Agency,
2. Manual on Accreditation,
3. Standards for the Evaluation of Doctoral Programs.
All documents and policies are drafted upon close cooperation with the stakeholders, and their active inclusion is ensured throughout the entire process.

The Law on KAA sets out basic criteria and defines the rules and methodologies, whilst the assessment procedures of institutions and their study programmes are evaluated based on the Accreditation Manual. Thus, criteria for decision making are set by the national legislation and then elaborated by KAA in accordance with the ESG. The Law on KAA and other sub-legal acts recognizes only accreditation or rejection of accreditation. Thus,

accreditation with conditions or other forms of accreditation are not recognized within the system.

According to the Accreditation Manual, the assessment of higher education institutions and/or study programs is judged based on a four-levels compliance scale, as follows:

- ➢ Fully compliant
- ➢ Substantially compliant
- ➢ Partially compliant
- ➢ Non- compliant

The expert teams will address, through the External Review report, the compliance of the education provider against the standards included in the manual at two levels, as follows:

In order to assess the compliance level of each general area the following guidelines will be used:

- fully compliant − all the standards included in a particular general area are met. If the institution exceeds the standards and meets some of the performance indicators, commendations are appropriate. This recognition provides the institution motivation to pursue even greater levels of excellence in their quality management practices;
- substantially compliant − 70 − 90% of the standards included in a particular general area are met, while the others are not yet in line with stated expectations. Also, there is potential for requirements of the standards not to be satisfied before the next review (examples may include the loss of key faculty members due to retirements, declining student enrolment, or projected reductions in financial or personnel resources, and others);
- partially compliant – 30 − 70% of the standards included in a particular general area are met. Also, the institution lacks the strength of compliance with the standards to ensure that the quality of the institution will not be compromised;
- non-compliant − less than 30% of the standards included in a particular general area are met. The institution does not satisfy the requirements of the standards.

The overall compliance level is determined by the compliance across all general areas. The most frequent compliance level across the general areas determines the overall compliance level.

According to the Accreditation Manual, in order to be granted a positive decision for institutional accreditation the education provider has to demonstrate at least a substantial compliance level in the overall judgment. Therefore, failure in meeting at least an overall substantial compliance level entails withdrawing, suspending, or denying institutional accreditation. In order to increase further the quality of the institutions of higher education, KAA has decided to prioritize two general areas of the accreditation standards for

institutional accreditation in the Accreditation Manual. General Area 6 related to Learning and Teaching, and General Area 10 related to Learning Resources and Facilities have become mandatory. No accreditation on institutional level can be granted unless these two (2) general areas has been fulfilled to either substantially or fully compliant level.

The accreditation period for institutional accreditation lasts three (3) to five (5) years. According to the law, if an institution fails to be re-accredited at the institutional level, this will result in organizing another re-accreditation process after one (1) year. The institution that fails for the first time to obtain institutional re-accreditation is prohibited from enrolling new students for the respective academic year. At the same time, it can continue to operate with the currently enrolled students until the second evaluation. If the higher education institution fails to be re-accredited at the institutional level for the second time, the KAA will notify the Ministry of further procedures. The institution that does not receive institutional accreditation even after the second evaluation is obliged to ensure the completion of the studies for all enrolled students.

According to the Accreditation Manual, in order to be granted a positive decision for study program accreditation, Bachelor and Master, the education provider has to demonstrate at least a substantial compliance level in the overall judgment. Furthermore, KAA has decided to prioritize two general areas of the accreditation standards for study programs: General Area 3. related to Academic staff, and General Area 7. related to Infrastructure and Resources have become mandatory. No accreditation of programmes on Bachelor or Master level can be granted unless these two general areas has been fulfilled to either substantially or fully compliant level.

According to the Standards for the Evaluation of Doctoral Programs, the standards are divided in to two types, core and supplementary. There are, in total, 52 standards: 36 core and 16 supplementary standards. All the core standards are obligatory in order to achieve a positive evaluation. A doctoral programme can be accredited in the case of full or substantial compliance. To be fully compliant, doctoral programme must meet all the core standards and at least 12 of the supplementary standards. Whereas to be substantially compliant, all the core standards must be met. In addition, between 1 and 11 of the supplementary standards must be met.

The accreditation period for study program accreditation (BA; MA; PhD) lasts three (3) to five (5) years. Decisions of the SCQ for study programs clearly indicate the number of students allowed to be enrolled each academic year.

As it is explained under section on ESG 2.6 (Reporting) following the evaluation procedure, after the site visit, the expert panel drafts the evaluation report according to predefined templates by KAA. The expert panel need to conclude the evaluation report with a clear recommendation to accredit/not to accredit the institution/study program for a duration of 1/3/5 years with a specific number of students to be enrolled in the program.

The expert panel evaluation report is then used as a basis for decision making by the SCQ. All review reports are carefully read and analyzed by the SCQ ensuring that expert judgments per each general area are clearly elaborated, are evidence based and that the overall final recommendation of the expert panels complies with the compliance levels as defined in the Accreditation Manual.

Once the evaluation report is approved and the SCQ has made an accreditation decision, the legal office of KAA issues the decision which is then sent to the education provider. MESTI is also officially informed of the SCQ decisions.

One of the recommendations of the ENQA's external review report for KAA suggested that *in assessing standards and in decision-making a cautious approach to applying arithmetic should be asked for. One area may carry more weight than another, and the standards may not always be of equal importance*. In response, the Accreditation Manual and the Standards for PhD programs envisage the obligatory standards, i.e. the standards that must have a positive assessment grade from the Expert Panels.

As regarding monitoring, the KAA Methodology for Follow-up Procedure and Monitoring, allows SCQ to reach a formal outcome based on the results of the monitoring procedure. The formal outcomes is a) to withdraw the accreditation at the institutional or study program level or b) place the study program or the institution under the process of external evaluation. The decision-making with regards to the Monitoring is elaborated below:

General Monitoring
- Monitoring of study program holders – KAA monitors the holders of the study program for each program accredited in Kosovo. If KAA verifies that program holders, as approved by SCQ, have been changed or are no longer part of the HEI, it requires from the HEI to propose a replacement of the holder within 90 days. Following a verification process by the KAA staff to ensure that the new holder meets the formal criteria of the legislation, the SCQ decides on the approval/rejection of the new holder. In case the institution fails to propose the replacement of the holder within the time period of 90 days, SCQ, can proceed with the withdrawal of accreditation for the respective study program.
- Monitoring of official websites and advertising materials of HEIs - The monitoring of HEI websites is done in order to ensure that the information published by HEIs regarding the accreditation of study programs is accurate. In case the KAA staff confirms through reasonable evidence that the higher education institution has published information which, within the legal scope of the KAA is not accurate, including, but not limited to, the advertising of study programs without accreditation by the SCQ, submission of specializations as separate study programs contrary to the decision of accreditation by the SCQ, submission of the name of the institution contrary to the decision of accreditation by the SCQ, etc., KAA officially addresses the institution to remove the inaccurate information and ask to correct them in accordance

with the decisions of the SCQ within 5 (five) working days. In case the institution fails to replace the information within a certain period of time, KAA notifies the SCQ. If the SCQ considers that the reasoning of the institution is unreasonable and that the institution by its actions has seriously violated the given conditions of accreditation, the SCQ decides that the study program and/or the institution is placed in the process of external evaluation.

Monitoring according to standards of the accreditation manual
- Monitoring of academic staff - monitoring of the academic staff is done to ensure that the higher education institution is offering the study program with the academic staff as presented in the self-assessment report. In case the KAA officials, either through remote monitoring, or physical visit to the institution, prove through reasonable evidence that a part of the academic staff, based on which the study program has been positively evaluated by international accreditation experts, are not present in the higher education institution and they no longer have a contractual relationship with the relevant institution, the KAA requests from the institution a written justification for the reasons for leaving the academic staff. The higher education institution is obliged within three (3) working days to submit to the KAA the reasoning according to the requirements of the KAA. If the SCQ considers that the reasoning of the institution is unfounded and that the institution by its actions has seriously violated the given conditions of accreditation, the SCQ decides that the study program and/or the institution is placed in the process of external evaluation.
- Monitoring lecture and exercise schedules - monitoring of lecture schedules is done in order to ensure the compliance of the accredited curriculum according to the Self-Assessment Report. In case the KAA officials, either through remote monitoring or physical visit to the institution, prove through reasonable evidence that a part of the academic staff is not present in lectures and/or exercises and/or practice, and that the teaching process is not being held in accordance with the number of classes presented in the SER, KAA requests from the institution a written justification for the reasons for the lack of teaching staff or the change of the teaching process. The higher education institution is obliged within three (3) working days to submit to the KAA the justification according to the requirements of the KAA. If the SCQ considers that the reasoning of the institution is unfounded and that the institution with its actions has seriously violated the conditions of accreditation, the SCQ formally requests the institution to improve the situation within a time limit which is determined by the SCQ. The higher education institution within the time period determined by the SCQ provides evidence based on the KAA to improve the situation and may request a formal consultative meeting with the Director of the KAA and/or SCQ members. If even after the additional time limit is granted, the institution fails to submit relevant evidence for the improvement of the situation, the SCQ places the study program and/or the institution in the process of external evaluation.
- Monitoring of infrastructure and resources - Monitoring of infrastructure and resources is done in order to ensure that higher education institutions maintain the standards of the Accreditation Manual presented in the Self-Assessment Report. . In case the KAA

officials prove through reasonable evidence that a part of the laboratories, practical workspaces and/or laboratory equipment are not functional and/or are not used as an integral part of the teaching process, the KAA will request from the institution a written justification for the reasons for the lack of functioning of the physical infrastructure. The higher education institution is obliged within three (3) working days to submit to the KAA the reasoning according to the requirements of the KAA. If the SCQ considers that the reasoning of the institution is unfounded and that the institution with its actions has seriously violated the conditions of accreditation, the SCQ decides that the study program and/or the institution to be placed in the process of external evaluation.

Extraordinary monitoring
- Monitoring initiated after received complaints from external parties - KAA may accept at any time complaints submitted by individuals or organizations which indicate a decline in the quality of higher education institutions and/or their study programs. In case the SCQ considers that the complaint submitted to the KAA is credible and justified, then the SCQ requests from the relevant institution to submit a report within a certain period of time which presents its position towards the submitted complaint. If the SCQ considers that the reasoning of the institution is unfounded, the SCQ formally requests from the institution the improvement of the situation within a time limit which is determined by the SCQ and/or the organization of a monitoring visit by the KAA officials. The higher education institution within the time period determined by the SCQ provides the evidence either by sending it electronically to the KAA or by presenting it during the monitoring visit by KAA officials. If, even after the additional deadline, the institution fails to submit relevant evidence for the improvement of the situation, the SCQ proceeds with the initiation of an early accreditation visit at the institutional level and/or at the level of the study program.
- Submission of false evidence to the KAA - In case the KAA becomes aware that, in order to make a decision on accreditation, re-accreditation or validation, the higher education institution has submitted false information at any stage of the evaluation and accreditation process, the KAA officially notifies the SCQ at the next meeting. In case the SCQ considers that the notification of the KAA is grounded, then the CSSCQC requests from the relevant institution that within a certain period of time to submit a report which presents its position towards the notification of the KAA. If the SCQ considers that the reasoning of the institution is unfounded, the SCQ decides that the study program and/or the institution be placed in the process of external evaluation. The report of the team of international external evaluators is submitted to the CSSCQC and addressed at one of the SCQ meetings.
- Monitoring in cooperation with the Education Inspectorate - The KAA may have a request from the Education Inspectorate to conduct a physical monitoring visit to accredited higher education institution in the Republic of Kosovo. In case the minutes of the monitoring visit indicate a violation of the given conditions of accreditation according to the decision of the SCQ, the KAA sends such minutes to the SCQ for review. SCQ after reviewing the minutes requires the relevant institution to submit a report within a certain period of time to present its position. If the SCQ considers that

the reasoning of the institution is unfounded, the SCQ decides that the study program and/or the institution be placed in the process of external evaluation.

5.6. Reporting

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

KAA has published full evaluation reports in its webpage since the initial accreditation procedure in 2009. The publication of full evaluation reports is anchored in the legal framework in place, including the Law on Higher Education and lately the Law on KAA.

KAA has updated its webpage in 2021 allowing the general public to more easily access information about the accreditation status and evaluation reports for all institutions of higher education and their study programs. Evaluation reports are published on the website for each higher education individually, separately for institutional evaluation and study program evaluation. Whereas evaluation reports are individually published, the SCQ decision might include different study programs within one decision. This depends on the number of programs the SCQ reviewed and approved within one meeting. SCQ decisions are published on the KAA website.

All evaluation reports are drafted in English. Considering that English is the primary language of the accreditation process, KAA has not faced any objection from any HEI so far. KAA believes that having English reports is good for international transparency and trust, and it is not only a side effect of experts being all foreigners.

Over the years, KAA has paid particular attention to the quality of evaluation reports. The Accreditation Manual introduced guidelines for drafting of the evaluation report and the respective templates, and these have greatly contributed to the improvement of reports with regards to their structure, clarity, analysis and elaboration of standards. According to the Accreditation Manual, the evaluation reports must ensure coherence flow between the body of the report and the expert panel's recommendations, i.e. recommendations must be fully supported by evidence and arguments included in the body of the report.

Since the approval of the Accreditation Manual in 2018, KAA has introduced a template for the evaluation reports which follows a general structure consisting of four main chapters:

➢ Introduction: The introductory chapter allows experts to provide information about the general context of the evaluation. Specifically, this part contains information about the institution under evaluation, the date of evaluation, the expert panel members, the coordinator of KAA, sources of information used for drafting the evaluation report,

criteria used for institutional and program evaluation, and the site visit schedule including the stakeholders with whom the panel met.

➢ Institutional/study program evaluation: The second chapter constitutes the core content of the evaluation report, in which experts need to insert all comment or observations, commendations and suggestion related to each general area of standards individually. After the general area has been elaborated, experts must indicate the compliance level, namely fully compliant/substantially compliant/partially compliant/non-compliant. In addition, under each general area, experts are required to provide recommendations for improvement.

➢ Overall evaluation and judgment of the panel: in this chapter experts describe overall observations referring to in the evaluation process, the quality at the institutional level, the institutional approach to the site visit, the main areas of concern (if applicable), etc. The experts need to conclude the evaluation with a clear recommendation to accredited/not to accredit the institution/study program for a duration of 1/3/5 years with a specific number of students to be enrolled in the program.

Information about the calculation of the compliance levels is provided for under the Accreditation Manual and are explained in detail in the training and briefing meetings with the experts before the site visit.

In case different study program are evaluated by the same expert panel, all study programs must be approached individually with the same level of details of information as described above. Most importantly, the compliance level and the conclusion need to be separately formulated for each study program individually.

Appendices: if applicable, experts may attach a specific appendix to the evaluation report, if it contributes to the clarity of the assessment or if it contains a specific recommendation elaborated in more detail.

Aiming to increase the quality of reports, KAA assigns one KAA coordinator for each evaluation procedure who maintains regular contact with the expert panel, through meetings online or through email correspondence through all stages of the evaluation process. The KAA coordinator ensures the correct application of the Accreditation Manual and that the expert teams triangulate and cross-reference the data sources (self-evaluation report, site visit and additional documentation) to reach sound judgments.

Since 2019, KAA has strengthened the validation mechanism: the KAA coordinator thoroughly reviews the draft evaluation. In cases when the report is considered of poor quality or deeper analysis and scrutiny is required, or in case if there are contradictions between the content and the final recommendation, it is sent back for further adjustments or amendments within a set deadline. Only when evaluation reports align with the KAA guidelines they are send to the HEIs for potential comments.

As for the accreditation process, KAA has drafted templates for monitoring procedures, in accordance with KAA's Methodology for Follow-up Procedures and Monitoring. They are drafted for every type of monitoring procedure that is performed by KAA officials. As a general rules, according to the templates, the reports must contain the following elements:

➢ The first chapter: An introduction, in which must be written the names of the KAA officials who carried out the monitoring procedure, the date of the monitoring procedure, the form of carrying out the monitoring procedure (remote, with an unannounced on-site visit, with an announced on-site visit), the persons with whom the KAA officials have met in the site visit, as well as the sources of information for the monitoring report.

➢ The second chapter - KAA officials must provide a brief description of the development of the procedure.

➢ Final assessment – KAA officials must provide a brief explanation of their findings in the monitoring report based on the monitoring procedure.

➢ Attachments (if applicable) - if applicable, KAA officials may attach a specific appendix to the monitoring report, if it contributes to the clarity of the report or if it contains a specific recommendation elaborated in more detail.

➢ Signing officials for evaluation and monitoring of KAA – the monitoring report should be signed by the KAA officials who have completed the monitoring procedure.

Monitoring reports are published in the KAA website.

5.7. ESG - Complaints and appeals

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

Appeals Committee

According to article 22 of the Law on KAA, the Appeals Committee (AC) is a permanent body of KAA, which handles appeals by higher education institutions. The Appeal Committee consists of five (5) permanent members elected based on an open call published by KAA. Members of the Appeal Committee are Kosovo nationals.

All persons who meet the following criteria shall have the right to apply for AC:

➢ Three (3) AC members should be lawyers, while two (2) members should be university professors. Also, they must prove knowledge of the higher education system in the Republic of Kosovo and knowledge of quality assurance.

➢ The lawyer members must have at least five (5) years of professional experience.

The AC members are elected for a four-year mandate, with the possibility of being elected for another mandate. KAA establishes a temporary commission who make the selection of AC members from the applicants' ranks. The selection commission is composed of:

➢ representative from the Ministry- one (1) member, the chairperson;
➢ representative from the KAA, one (1) member;
➢ representative from the Rectors conference- one (1) member;
➢ full professor from the Law Faculty - one (1) member;
➢ representative of a development partner in the field of higher education– one (1) member

According to the Law on KAA, HEIs can appeal[1] decisions of the SCQ and appeals are considered by the Appeals Committee. Any other dissatisfaction, misapprehensions, or potential violation of applicable regulations in the application process can be addressed through the Appeal Committee, too.

The Appeals Commission during the handling of the appeal, has the right to invite the party who has filed an appeal for a hearing. Throughout its work, all HEIs who have filed an appeal have been invited to hearing where they have presented their arguments in front of the AC members.

AC has adopted its work regulation which is published on the KAA web page.

Article 24 of the Law on KAA, also defines the dismissal of the Appeals Committee members. AC members are dismissed in the following cases:

➢ physical or mental inability to exercise their function;
➢ it is found that there is a conflict of interest;
➢ he/she is convicted of a criminal offense with effective imprisonment;
➢ abuse of official duty;
➢ refusal to perform the duties defined by the work regulation;
➢ absent more than twice in a row in meetings of the AC without reasonable justification.

Procedure for dismissal of AC member can be initiated by the Minister, SCQ or the majority of AC members. For the dismissal of the AC member, the KAA establishes a temporary Commission composed of the:

➢ representative from the Ministry, one (1) member;
➢ representative from the KAA, one (1) member;
➢ representative from the Rectors conference, one (1) member;
➢ full professor from the Law Faculty - one (1) member;

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[1] The English translation of the Law uses the word "complaint", but what it describes are actually "appeals" in the ESG terminology.

> representative of an active international development partner in the field of higher education in Kosovo, one (1) member.

The Commission makes a decision regarding the proposal for dismissal by a majority vote of all its members. The dismissed member of AC has the right to appeal according to the legislation in force.

Appeals

The grounds for appeal and hence the review by the Appeals Committee is limited to the procedural aspect of the accreditation process outcomes. That is, appeals can be made if KAA has not correctly followed the applicable rules of the Law or Accreditation Manual, but HEIs cannot appeal the substantial judgement of the expert panel and SCQ.

If the Appeals Committee finds that the appeal filed by the institution is substantiated, then it refers the matter back to the SCQ with a suggestion to reconsider their initial decision. The SCQ then needs to make a new decision.

If the Appeal Committee finds that the appeal of the institution is unsubstantiated, it rejects the appeal. In this case, the original SCQ decision is final. The HEI may still address the issue to the department for administrative matters within the competent court.

The Appeal Committee is very active and has treated all the appeals within the prescribed deadlines. The following table gives an overview of appeals during the last three calendar years:

Year	2021	2022	2023
Appeals made	18	23	20
approved	0	4	5
rejected	18	15	12
withdrawn	0	4	3

While KAA considers that the accreditation process and decision-making is fully based on the procedures defined by the law and the Accreditation Manual, the Appeals Committee still accepts appeals that are submitted formally without strong basis for appeal. Therefore, in some cases, HEIs are withdrawn from the appeal process.

According to the KAA's Methodology for Follow-up Procedures and Monitoring, any decision reached by the SCQ with regards to any of the monitoring procedures, the higher education institution can file an appeal according to the legislation of the KAA and the general laws in force. However, the Appeals Procedure has yet to be revised to include appeals with regards to the SCQ decisions for the monitoring procedure.

Complaints

Besides the appeals procedure, all higher education institutions are entitled to file complaints about the process, experts or KAA staff. This implies that HEIs do not seek directly to change the decision of the SCQ but are entitled to officially complain about certain parts of the procedure, the behaviors of experts or the staff of KAA. Depending on the nature of complaint received, these complaints are handled by the KAA staff or the SQC and through a less formal process than appeals. With the approval of the new Law on KAA, KAA has revised many of its regulations and policies. To this end, KAA still needs to draft a separate policy for complaints.

6. Compliance European Standards and Guidelines ESG (Part III)

6.1. Activities, policy, and processes for quality assurance

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

KAA is a regulatory quality assurance agency that conducts its responsibilities based on policies, standards, and regulations drafted and approved by the agency. The primary responsibilities of KAA (*see also section 5 above for a full overview*) include accreditation and re-accreditation of higher education institutions and their study programs, regardless of the form (online, distance, double degrees) and language offered, including branches, if applicable. KAA is also responsible for recognizing international accreditation and for monitoring, i.e. performing periodic quality controls to advance quality in accredited institutions of higher education continuously. Accompanying its primary, statutory responsibilities, KAA engages in local and European projects related to quality assurance and in international exchange with agencies and other partners, e.g. as ENQA affiliate.

The primary legal documents that define the work of KAA are the Law on Higher Education and the Law on the Kosovo Accreditation Agency. Prior to the adoption of the Law on KAA, the Administrative Instruction for the Accreditation of HEIs in Kosovo No.15/2018 was a sub-legal act deriving from the Law on Higher Education, which defined the procedures, criteria, and processes of external evaluation, including the functioning of the KAA bodies. With the new Law on KAA, a similar Administrative Instruction on Accreditation deriving from the Law on KAA is being drafted and is expected to be approved.

In addition to legal and by-laws, for each external evaluation process, KAA has drafted specific documents such as the Accreditation Manual, which defines the standards of institutional accreditation and accreditation of study programs at BA and MA levels, the Regulation for the Evaluation of Doctoral Programs, the Methodology of Follow-Up Procedures and Monitoring, the Regulation on Procedures and Criteria for external evaluation by International Accreditation Agencies, etc.

KAA has also approved documents that regulate its operations, including guidelines and strategic documents.

6.1.1. KAA Strategic Plan

KAA has approved its Strategic Plan 2021-2025, which serves as a basic document to determine the strategic orientation of the organization for the next 5 years. The strategic

plan was drafted in accordance with KAA's mission which has served as a guide for setting strategic objectives that enable the continuous evaluation of the effectiveness of the KAA's actions. KAA has ensured that the strategic objectives are set out in accordance with the requirements and needs of the higher education system in Kosovo and are suitable for the context within which the Kosovo's quality assurance system is developed. The KAA Strategic Plan underwent a thorough drafting process led by the Agency's staff. The design of the strategy also included four external experts who contributed to the formulation of the strategic objectives and individual actions per each objective. In addition, with support from the Heras+ project, the strategic plan was revised by an international expert who provided input to ensure that the document aligned with the ESGs and the recommendations of the ENQA's panel in the KAA's external review report (2019). For this purpose, a workshop was held, where in addition to the international expert, a few HEI representatives were invited ensuring comprehensive input and representation. Following the drafting process, KAA disseminated the strategic plan for consultation to institutions of higher education, international donors, international experts, and representatives of civil society organizations in Kosovo.

Strategic objectives are set based on the following intervention areas: legal framework, management and administration, external quality assurance, digitalization, and internationalization. They are defined as follows:

First strategic objective
"To regain the KAA membership in The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education- ENQA and registration in EQAR".

Second strategic objective
"To consolidate the legal framework that guarantees KAA institutional and financial independence in performing external quality assurance processes".

Third strategic objective
"To advance the KAA management and administration by increasing physical and professional capacities".

Fourth strategic objective
"To improve quality in higher education sector with efficient and effective accreditation and follow-up procedures".

Fifth strategic objective
"To advance KAA procedure digitalization for an effective external evaluation procedure information and data management".

Sixth strategic objective
"To strengthen KAA cooperation with external quality assurance international agencies".

As part of the strategic plan, KAA drafted a framework of activities with well-defined deadlines and performance indicators. This document guides KAA's annual activities, including the assessment of strategic objective achievements. KAA evaluates the implementation of strategic objectives annually, ensuring continuous improvement through regular reviews.

6.1.2. Annual work plan

In accordance with its strategic plan, KAA drafts annual work plans which are reviewed and approved by the SCQ. The annual work planning typically begins with a forecasting of expiring accreditations at the institutional and study program levels of higher education institutions and planning of monitoring visits. In addition, continuous communication with HEIs representatives enables KAA to be informed about their plans for initial accreditations. In addition to the accreditation process and monitoring procedures, other activities include review of the documents, organization of trainings with international experts, organization of study visits for the administrative staff, other activities for the professional development of the staff, communication with the relevant actors, etc. Annual work plans are evaluated at the end of each calendar year and evaluation reports are published on the web page.

6.1.3. Engagement of stakeholders

KAA includes and cooperates closely with the academic community and ensures social dialogue with all stakeholders in drafting rules, procedures, and standards of accreditation, validation, quality control, and monitoring. The recently adopted Law on KAA has significantly improved the engagement of stakeholders through provisions for a student member of the SCQ as well as two non-voting members representing industry/professional practice. KAA has encouraged the Government of Kosovo to speed up the process of appointment of the student member of SCQ and the two non-voting employers' representatives, however the procedure has not yet been initiated.

6.1.4. External quality assurance activities

Accreditation process
KAA's main external quality assurance activity is accreditation. Accreditation is a formal quality assessment process that determines the official status of recognition given by KAA for an institution of higher education and/or study programs. KAA organizes accreditation in time intervals of no more than five (5) years and it is conducted by reviewing a self-assessment report of the providers and through a direct inspection at the HEI premises by an international accreditation expert panel.

Monitoring procedures

Monitoring procedures which aim to verify and confirm whether the given conditions of accreditation as well as the standards of the Accreditation Manual continue to be applied by the accredited higher education institutions. These procedures are implemented at the institutional level and/or at the level of study programs and are not duplicated by the follow-up procedure which focuses only on fulfilling the recommendations given in the external valuation reports. Monitoring procedures procedures are described in detail in the Methodology for Follow-Up Procedures and Monitoring, a public document on the KAA website. The methodology aims to ensure a continuous interaction between the HEIs and the KAA to ensure that the goal of the improvement procedures, namely the quality enhancement of the HEIs, is continuously achieved. An overview of the different activities carried out in the previous five years is included in page 16 of this report.

KAA has also contributed to the drafting of documents that serve HEIs in improving their teaching and learning activities and the quality assurance system. An important example is the project supported by the University Support Grants Program through the U.S. Embassy in Kosovo and administered by the Kosovo United States Alumni, entitled "Increasing student participation in Internal and external quality assurance processes in Kosovo." The project aimed to encourage student participation in activities related to quality assurance which will contribute to improving the teaching and learning process. The project resulted in drafting a research Report on Student Engagement which provides a background, drawn from both theory and practice, grounding the Guidelines for student engagement in internal and external quality assurance of Kosovo Higher Education. In doing so, the research report is based on an international benchmarking analysis of best practice in Europe, a national diagnosis assessment of the KAA accreditation reports and the legal requirements in place, as well as a national survey conducted amongst more than 1000 students from both public and private Kosovar higher education institutions. In addition a "Guideline for Student Engagement in Internal and External Quality Assurance of Kosovo Higher Education" was drafted and two informative sessions with students were organized. In addition to informative sessions with students, KAA held meetings with HEIs through which it encouraged further student engagement.

6.2. Official Status

Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognized as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

Based on the legislation in force, KAA is a regulatory agency responsible for external quality assessment activities, including the accreditation of higher education institutions and their study programs.

Accreditation decisions have a clear legal status and are widely accepted by state authorities, by the stakeholders and the public in general. Article 15 of the Law on Higher

Education, Accreditation and Quality Assessment, paragraph 1, stipulates that "*All providers of higher education shall be subject to procedures for audit procedures and quality evaluation by the KAA in accordance with this Law and sub-legal acts*".

In addition, article 16 of the Law on Higher Education, Degrees and Diploma, paragraph 1, stipulates that "*An accredited provider of higher education shall have the right to award degrees and diplomas specified in its accreditation certificate: These may include degrees and diplomas offered jointly or as dual qualifications with one or more other institutions approved by the KAA*". Further, paragraph 7 of the same article, stipulates that "*Only those degrees and diplomas issued by accredited and licensed providers of higher education shall be recognized by the Government for the purposes of employment, to obtain public office or to perform the function of international recognition, as defined in sub-paragraph 1.7 of paragraph 1.and paragraph 2. of Article 6 this Law*".

An important milestone for the official status and independence of KAA was the approval of the Law on Kosovo Accreditation Agency by the Kosovo Assembly. It reiterates in Article 5: "*Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) is a regulatory agency for ensuring the quality in higher education which operates in the entire territory of the Republic of Kosovo.*"

KAA's commitment to this direction is continuous. Several important activities are planned under the KAA Strategic Plan, Objective 1, Measure 1.4., which include participating in working groups for the planning and improvement of higher education in Kosovo and the region, attending meetings with the industry, international donors, professional associations, etc.,

6.3. Independence

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

KAA is the main authority in the Republic of Kosovo responsible for ensuring the quality of higher education. Accreditation process is conducted through the quality standards and criteria defined and approved by the KAA and the State Council of Quality (SCQ) is the final authority to issue a decision on accreditation.

KAA's organisational, operational, and decision-making independence was significantly reinforced through the Law on KAA that was adopted in June 2023. Drafting the KAA Law was supported by all the main actors in higher education in Kosovo and other relevant institutions. The drafting process was comprehensive and included many public discussions at various levels. Placing the KAA Law on the state agenda was a commitment of the entire political and professional spectrum, who unanimously supported strengthening the role of KAA as an independent quality assurance agency.

The law's approval completed the full restoration and consolidation of KAA's independence after the events leading to KAA's exclusion from EQAR and ENQA in 2018. While the dismissal of the SCQ and Director in 2017 was possible through a lack of clear regulations in the former legal framework, the Law on KAA now rules out that officials are dismissed except for a well-defined list of exceptional circumstances.

6.3.1. Organisational independence

The [Law on Higher Education](#) No. 04/L-037, article 7, paragraph 1, stipulates that "*Kosovo Accreditation Agency KAA is an independent agency responsible for assessing and promoting quality of higher education in Kosovo. Through professional and transparent processes of quality assessment and quality audit and by other means deemed appropriate by it, which meet international best practices, KAA ensures that the standards and quality of higher education in Kosovo meet the demands and expectations of the European Network of the Association for quality assurance in higher education. (ENQA).*

Article 5 of the Law on KAA determines the status of the KAA as a regulatory agency for quality assurance in higher education operating throughout the territory of the Republic of Kosovo. The subsequent article 6, Duties and Responsibilities of the KAA, further elaborates on the scope of the KAA, which includes its operations concerning accreditation, validation, monitoring, continuous quality assessment and improvement, etc.

KAA consists of the State Council of Quality (SCQ), the KAA Director and Administration, and the Appeals Committee. The SCQ is a collegial decision-making authority for quality assurance in higher education, independent in exercising its functions defined under the Law on Higher Education and the Law on KAA.

Based on the provisions of these laws, the SCQ is responsible for deciding on the accreditation, reaccreditation, validation, follow-up procedures, monitoring, reviewing, and deciding on all requests of HEIs filed to the KAA concerning quality assurance procedures, including accreditation, validation, and monitoring. The SCQ is also responsible for approving the accreditation standards, the quality assurance procedures, and external evaluation criteria; it also approves the annual work plans of KAA and drafts and approves the internal regulations of KAA, such as internal quality assurance guidelines. The SCQ reports for its work regularly and ad-hoc to the relevant local authorities and society in general.

The work of SCQ is further defined in the [Regulation on the Work of the State Council of Quality (SCQ)](#) which is drafted and approved by the SCQ.

According to the legislation in force, members of the SCQ are selected based on predefined criteria (set out in the Law on KAA, articles 12 and 13) and a transparent selection procedure of the SCQ members (set out in the Law on KAA, articles 15 and 16). Based on the law, SCQ members are proposed by the MESTI and approved by the Assembly of the Republic of

Kosovo. Different stakeholders are involved in the selection process of SCQ members, including members from MESTI, an active international development partner in the field of education in Kosovo, members of civil society, members from the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Kosovo, and members from the Rector's Conference.

According to the Law on KAA, the selection and appointment procedure of the SCQ members is conducted as follows:

Article 12 of the Law on KAA, defines that Candidates for SCQ members should meet the following criteria:

➢ local members to be citizens of the Republic of Kosovo;
➢ members from the academic staff must have the degree of Doctor of Science, internationally recognized research experience, relevant academic experience at least five (5) years and experience in the field of quality assurance in higher education;
➢ in case the local members are graduates outside Kosovo, to have a diploma recognition in the national centre for recognition, equivalence and academic information ENIC-NARIC;
➢ to have considerable knowledge about the functioning of higher education and quality assurance in Kosovo which is evidenced through engagement or participation in relevant activities, projects, positions;
➢ to have considerable knowledge, experience for the functioning of the European Higher Education Area and international quality assurance standards in higher education;
➢ member from amongst the students shall be attending Master or Doctoral studies in the HEIs of Kosovo;
➢ three (3) international members must be experts in the field of quality assurance in higher education with academic experience, who are not and have not been citizens of the Republic of Kosovo and engaged in any higher education institution in Kosovo in last five (5) years.

Incompatibility to be a member of the SCQ, is defined under 13 which stipulates that, a SCQ member cannot be the person that:

➢ has exercised a political post in Kosovo in the last three (3) years;
➢ has been founder, co-founder, shareholder and member of the Steering Council in HEI in the last five (5) years;
➢ has current engagement in more than one higher education institution in Kosovo and abroad;
➢ has been punished by the Court final decision for a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment more than six (6) months according to Criminal Code of the Republic of Kosovo;
➢ it is ascertained that there is a conflict of interest according to the legislation in force

The Ministry publishes the public call for the nomination of SCQ local members. For the selection of international members, the Ministry calls on international development partners and agencies of states that are full members of ENQA / EQAR and the US Department of

Education to nominate experts from their respective countries who meet conditions required by the Law on KAA.

After the public call has been closed, the Ministry establishes the temporary Commission for the review of applications for SCQ members. Article 15 of the Law on KAA defines that, the temporary Commission according to paragraph 1 of this Article shall have the following composition:

➢ representative from the Ministry, one (1) member;
➢ representative- an academic from the Academy of Science and Arts of Kosovo, one (1) member;
➢ representative from the Rectors conference, one (1) member;
➢ representative of an active international development partner in the education field in Kosovo, one (1) member;
➢ representatives from civil society active in the education field, one (1) member

The Commission reviews the applications and prepares the short list of candidates, which should be at least twice the number of members elected respecting the fields and gender composition and recommends it to the Minister of Education. According to article 16, from the shortlist proposed by the Temporary Commission, the Minister of Education selects six (6) local members. Three (3) international candidates for SCQ members shall be added to the list of local candidate members.

After obtaining the personal written consent of each of the selected candidates, the Minister of Education forwards the list to the Government for initial approval who proceed the selected candidates to be voted by the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo.

Prior to the adoption of the Law on KAA, similar criteria and procedures were in place. The provisions for the appointment of the SCQ members were defined in the Law on Higher Education whereas the criteria and procedures were set out in the Administrative Instruction No. 06/2018 on the Criteria and Procedures on the Appointment of the Members of the State Council of Quality (SCQ) of KAA. This AI that was introduced to enhance the regulations after the dismissal of the SCQ in 2017 and the following exclusion of KAA from EQAR. It is important to note that because the Law on KAA has become effective last year, all present members of the SCQ have been elected based on this AI and the provisions of the Law on Higher Education.

The Appeals Committee is a KAA body responsible to review the appeals of higher education institutions filed against the decisions of SCQ. Its composition and election procedure are defined under the Law on KAA. Prior to the adoption of the Law on KAA, similar criteria and procedures were defined under the AI on Accreditation of HEIs No.15/2018. The Appeals Committee's work and responsibilities are regulated under the Regulation on Appeals Committee.

In order to preserve the independence of the SCQ and the Appeals Committee, the Law on KAA has extensively elaborated not only on their nomination and composition, but also regulates the procedure to dismiss the members of the SQC (article 17) and the procedure to dismiss the members of the Appeals Committee (article 24). These provisions now contain a clear and narrow list of exceptional circumstances that objectively justify the dismissal of a member, for example to make sure that the SCQ stays operational in case of a member refusing to exercise their responsibilities or to allow that an SCQ member can be dismissed in case they committed a serious criminal offence.

Article 17 of the Law on KAA, defines that a SCQ member shall be dismissed if:

➢ finding that he/she has been appointed a member of the SCQ based on illegal documentation;
➢ he/she has been punished by the Court final decision for a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment more than six (6) months according to Criminal Code of the Republic of Kosovo;
➢ physical or mental disability ascertained by the medical commission;
➢ abuse of official duty;
➢ finding that there is a conflict of interest during the exercise of the function as a member of the SCQ;
➢ refusal to perform the duties defined by the rules of procedure of the SCQ;
➢ absence without reason based more than twice in a row in SCQ meetings.

Procedure for dismissal of the SCQ member can be initiated by the Assembly or MESTI. For the dismissal of the SCQ member, the Minister shall, within fifteen (15) days, establish a temporary Commission composed of the:

➢ representative from the Ministry, one (1) member;
➢ representative- an academic from the Academy of Science and Arts of Kosovo, one (1) member;
➢ representative from the Rectors conference, one (1) member;
➢ representative of an active international development partner in the field of higher
➢ education in Kosovo, one (1) member;
➢ representatives from civil society dealing with higher education, one (1) member.

The Commission submits to the Minister a report and a proposal for the appropriate measures related to the dismissal initiative. The Minister decides based on the proposal of the Commission and the Government proceeds to the Assembly for dismissal the SCQ member/s.

The Director of KAA is selected based on the Regulation no. 17/2018 on the procedures for appointments to senior management positions in the civil service of the Republic of Kosovo. The regulation stipulates that the Government of the Republic of Kosovo sets the overarching policy framework for appointing senior management positions. Administrative support for this system is provided by the Ministry of Public Administration, while the Commission on Senior

Management Positions oversees policy implementation. The relevant ministry, in this case MESTI, was tasked with initiating the recruitment procedure for the Director of KAA, whilst assessing the need for specific selection criteria beyond those outlined in the regulation. The Minister of MESTI proposed the announcement of the competition to the Ministry of Public Administration and the Commission screened the applicants to ensure eligibility. Following a selection process aimed at identifying the most suitable candidate, the Commission presented the top three candidates, along with their scores, to the Ministry of Public Administration. The Ministry of Public Administration forwarded this information, along with its conclusions drawn by the Commission, to the MESTI who decided about the preferred candidate. The preferred candidate decided by the Minister of MESTI, Mr. Naim Gashi, was appointed by the Government to the position of KAA Director for two consecutive mandates, in 2020 for the first mandate, and again in 2023 for the second mandate.

It is important to add, that in addition to the general criteria set out in the above regulation, additional criteria are set under the new Law on KAA. Article 19 include specific experience in quality assurance, knowledge in the field of quality assurance of higher education of the Republic of Kosovo, including knowledge about the European system of quality assurance in higher education.

KAA Administrative staff are recruited based on the Law No. 03/L- 149 on the Civil Service of the Republic of Kosovo. Their duties and responsibilities in addition to being defined according to the general law, are also defined under the Regulation on the Internal organisation and systematisation of works which is adopted by KAA in 2024. It is important to note, that besides the overall procedure defined by the Ministry of Public Administration, which KAA has to respect, the KAA organises the recruitment process of its administrative staff and decides about their employment independently from MESTI.

6.3.2. Operational independence

The legal basis allows KAA freedom in deciding accreditation standards and criteria within the general framework set by Article 29 of the Law on KAA, prescribing the general areas/topics that accreditation standards need to cover. KAA is also free to decide all other documents and policies that regulate KAA's work.

Article 7, paragraph 3 of the Law on Higher Education defines that "*KAA shall publish its policies, criteria and standards for accreditation and its decisions, recommendations and advice in respect of particular institutions and programmes. It shall publish an Annual Report*". Likewise, article 6 of the Law on KAA, paragraph 1.11., defines that KAA "*is responsible for drafting and approval of rules and procedures, criteria, forms of accreditation, re/accreditation, validation, external assessment, quality control, monitoring and election of international experts*".

The documents that are decided and approved by KAA range from accreditation criteria and standards to accreditation procedures, including guidelines, such as: The Accreditation Manual

(including the Standards for the Institutional/Study program Accreditation), Accreditation Standards for PhD programs, Methodology on Monitoring and Post-Accreditation Procedures, the SCQ Regulations, KAA's Strategic Plan, etc. As explained under ESG 3.1, KAA involves and cooperates closely with the academic community when drafting and revising its quality standards and other criteria. Following the public discussions, the final approving body of the documents is the State Council of Quality (SCQ).

Through drafting the regulations and documents mentioned above, KAA is independent in establishing an external quality assessment model and designing the accreditation procedure. The main legal basis that determines the assessment form is the Law on Higher Education, the Law on KAA and the Administrative Instruction on Accreditation; however, the Accreditation Manual and other regulations, such as the newly approved Regulation by the SQC for the Appointment, Engagement, and Compensation of International Accreditation Experts, define in detail KAA's procedures and operations for organizing the accreditation procedures.

In the external evaluation process, KAA uses the list of international experts, which is regularly updated by the Director of KAA and approved by the SCQ. Based on the Law on KAA, KAA decides the criteria and procedure for the selection of international experts and independently decides on their engagement based on transparent and public procedures. KAA considers it helpful that key provisions, such as the use of international experts, are part of the Law on KAA to ensure that there is broad societal consensus and to avoid these principles from being changed too easily.

With the new Appointment, Engagement, and Compensation of International Accreditation Experts, the SCQ shall approve the composition of each expert panel for each institution, thus serving as a second filter that examines the suitability of the expert panels for evaluating the given institution of higher education.

6.3.3.   Independence of formal outcomes

The Law on Higher Education and the Law on KAA respectively, recognise the State Council of Quality (SCQ) as the decision-making body for quality assurance in higher education. The primary responsibilities of SCQ are to decide on the accreditation, re/accreditation and validation of higher education institutions at institutional and program level. SCQ can also withdraw the accreditation of a higher education institution or its study programs, in case there is evidence that criteria based on which the accreditation is granted are violated.

SCQ decisions are based on evaluation reports drafted by international expert panels, which are appointed by SCQ from amongst the pool of experts managed under the authority of SCQ. Both the expert panels and SCQ are supported by the responsible KAA coordinator. No external actors are involved in the preparation of reports and the decision-making of SCQ.

Decisions of the SQC are final and do not need any endorsement from any other governmental authority. Institutions are entitled to file an appeal against the SCQ decision to the Appeals Committee as a first instance, leading to an internal and independent review of the appeal, however limited to procedural grounds (see ESG 2.7) HEIs may still address the competent court for an administrative contest.

6.4. Thematic Analysis

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

In line with its Strategic Plan (*see strategic objective 1*, "*Meeting recommendations of the ENQA's external review team"),* KAA has undertaken concrete actions to conduct thematic analyses during the past years. Initially, KAA increased the number of instruments for data collection and improved its digitization infrastructure, which enabled the extraction and evaluation of relevant data from the external evaluation processes and reports. In addition, KAA has continuously strived to standardise its external evaluation reports so as to facilitate the usage of data from a range of reports.

KAA holds annual international conference where various aspects of QA in higher education are discussed with the participation of Kosovar higher education community, external stakeholders (industry, professional associations) and international guests. The discussion is supported by the findings of the analyses and serves as a feedback mechanism for identification of most relevant issues and areas for improvement.

KAA's initial activity to this direction was drafting the Guidelines for conducting thematic analyses by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency, adopted in July 2021. Drafting a guideline before drafting an actual policy was intended to initially provide a clear framework and set of instructions that would precede the adoption of the policy. The Guideline was drafted within the project "Supporting KAA in achieving some of ENQA recommendations" within the University Support Grants Program of the US Embassy in Kosovo. It includes the definition of the purpose or the purposes of thematic analyses and the definition of thematic analysis. To this end, the aim of establishing a methodology for implementing thematic analyses is to assess the overall impact of KAA's accreditation procedures, contribute to further reflections and discussions, and improve quality assurance practices in a national and international context. KAA considers as important to conduct three types of thematic analysis, namely the systematic use of quality assurance reports for analysis, thematic reports for specific topics, and additional gathering of information. KAA has not yet

Following its Guideline, KAA, in the last three years has conducted the following thematic analyses:

Preparing Kosovar Graduates for the Labor Market - The Perspective of Employers and Graduates.

The thematic analysis on "Preparation of the Kosovar graduates for the labour market – employer and alumni perspective" aims to serve to higher education policymakers and other stakeholders as a good base for general discussions and decisions for the relevance of the entire higher education sector and its cooperation with the business community. Moreover, it aims to contribute to raising awareness of Kosovo HEIs and policy-makes on the quality of the preparation of graduates for the labour market. The thematic analysis was conducted by developing a questionnaire for graduates and another questionnaire for employers that have employed graduates from the higher education providers in Kosovo.

Thematic Analysis for Institutional Accreditation for HEIs

This thematic analysis on Institutional Accreditation of Kosovar Higher Education Institutions aimed to serve to higher education policy makers and other stakeholders as a good base for general discussions and decisions for the entire higher education sector. The relevance of the thematic analysis on Institutional Accreditation of Kosovar Higher Education Institutions is on meeting the criteria set by the KAA. The analysis of all self-evaluation reports prepared by HEIs, and experts reports, gave a comprehensive picture of the current state of the quality of higher education institutions in Kosovo. Therefore, this thematic analysis was conducted by collecting the expert teams reports of the institutions that have applied for institutional accreditation at KAA during the academic years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021.

Thematic Analysis of Processes Involved in Accreditation/Reaccreditation of Study Programs.

KAA in collaboration with an American professor Christine Austin, has developed the Thematic Analysis of Processes Involved in Accrediting/Reaccrediting Study Programs: A Three-Year Review of Accreditation Processes for a Study Program (at both bachelor's and master's levels) at three public and three private institutions in the Republic of Kosovo. At the core of this analysis is the reflection of the interaction between accreditation standards governing the program evaluation process.

As part of this activity, an analysis of self-assessment reports of higher education institutions and final reports of international experts engaged by KAA was conducted. This analysis included 6 institutions (3 public/3 private) over a 3-year timeframe with the aim of identifying common points and differences during the evaluation processes as well as identifying areas for improvement, challenges, and trends within the evaluation processes themselves. This initiative was developed within the framework of the Fulbright Specialist Program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and funded by the U.S. Government, and implemented by World Learning.

In addition to the strategic objective 1, drafting of the analysis simultaneously contributes to the KAA's Strategic Objective 4 "*Improving quality in the higher education sector through efficient and effective accreditation and monitoring procedures.*" KAA intends to continue with preparing thematic analysis in line with its approved Guidelines. After the accreditation process of HEIs for this year will be completed, KAA will be particularly

interested in exploring the field of study programs in economics, computer sciences, and information technology.

KAA still needs to draft the policy for thematic analysis; based on its work plan, the Thematic Analysis Policy is expected to be drafted and approved by the end of 2024.

6.5. ESG - Resources

Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

6.5.1. Financial Resources

Funds for financing the work of KAA are provided from 1. The budget of the Republic of Kosovo, 2. Own revenues (fees by HEIs) and 3. Donations, grants, or similar funds in compliance with the legislation in force. These funds are dedicated to Salaries and Allowances, Goods and Services, Utilities and Capital Expenditures.

The annual budget is compiled based on the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework, which is the Kosovo government's main three-year policy and budget planning document. It is through this document which the KAA presents new policies and budget requirements. Annex 1 presents the details about the budget appropriations for the years 2021-2024, according to the Law on Budget Appropriations for each year. The unused funds in the fund Own Source Revenues are carried over to the budget of the next year, since in accordance with the law, if the approved amount in the own revenues is not spent in the current year, they are carried over to the next year.

In terms of own revenues, KAA collects fees from the higher education institutions who cover the cost of the accreditation process, including the process of institutional and study program accreditation and re-accreditation, the cost of international experts (depending on the number of experts engaged per panel), costs of branch accreditation, and the costs of super expertise at institutional level and program level. The costs for the monitoring process and post-accreditation procedures are covered by KAA through the economic category Goods and Services.

The budget appropriations were sufficient to cover the expenses incurred during the years 2021-2023. Annex 2. presents the incurred expenditures structured by economic category for the years 2021, 2022 and 2023. All own revenues shall be deposited in the state budget fund and shall be allocated according to the legislation into force. If the collected revenues exceed the amount of budget limit from this fund source, KAA can only use the amount defined by the Law on budget appropriations for each year.

Annex 3. presents details for the revenues that are collected through the years 2021, 2022 and 2023, and the budget limit approved to be used for each year.

All annexes can be found as a joint file in [this link](#).

6.5.2.   Human Resources

Human resources are one of the areas where the current management has put the most efforts in. The last ENQA reviewed report has served as a guiding tool for KAA into making the adequate changes and improvements, ensuring KAA's substantial compliance with the ESG. As pointed out in ENQA's external review report in 2019, the workload of the administrative staff of KAA has been high and this had consequently affected the effectiveness of activities. As such, with the new Law on KAA, a new organogram is created which foresees an increase of the number of administrative staff. In order to ensure that each function and responsibility of each administrative staff and structural unit is clearly defined and established, in January 2024, KAA approved the [Regulation on Organization and Systematisation of Jobs.](#)

When considering the staff capacity and the workload, one should be aware of the scope of tasks that KAA is trusted to perform. In comparison to other European counterparts, the most outstanding is the re-accreditation of study programmes that takes place every 3 or 5 years. This increases considerably the workload but is also necessary since Kosovo legislation allows a relatively liberal approach to the variety of entities that can provide higher education.

KAA currently employs 18 persons, of which nine (9) works in sector of evaluation and follow-up (an increase of 7 employees compared to 5 years ago), three (3) in the finance sector, two (2) in the legal issues sector, two (2) in the administration, one (1) IT and all these are led by the Director of KAA.

KAA is planning to announce a new competition for the remaining 12 vacant positions and complete the recruitment procedures by September 2024. The increase on number of employees from 10 to 18 currently and to 32 by the end of September represents an incremental growth of KAA's capacities in human resources, which is a reflection of the management to work in the increase of our capacities and the quality of our services.

The professional development of our staff is another key element of KAA's internal regulations and policies. Staff have a diverse option of in-house and external trainings which are provided, such as:

➢ Trainings carried out by external trainers and other staff with relevant experience (most of them directors of QA Agencies already members of ENQA/EQAR);
➢ Participation in workshops, conferences, seminars, forums, and study visits;
➢ Trainings provided in central level with regards to administration, human resources, legal issues etc.;
➢ Trainings and certifications provided by ENQA and CHEA;

➢ Mobility for career purposes, etc.

Beside multiple trainings that KAA's staff undergoes on yearly basis, it is important to highlight the following:

➢ ENQA Leadership Development Programme which was attended by two employees of KAA.
➢ TAIEX project, a training provided by Sandra Bezjak, which was aimed to helping KAA to further align its rules and procedures with the ESG, Part 3.
➢ The twining project with AQ Austria which has helped KAA to familiarize with the ESG but also train its staff on how to better conduct evaluation processes (all trainings being provided by the senior staff and board members of AQ Austria).
➢ Staff exchange through CEENQA Staff Exchange Project, resulting in KAA sending one of their staff to ASIIN for one month in order to familiarize with the processes of other agencies.
➢ KAA staff being certified by ATMAE as peer reviewers, resulting in KAA's staff taking part on evaluation of study programmes in USA etc.

In 2021, KAA has approved a [Manual on the KAA Staff Internal Evaluation](#) that sets out the rules and procedures for staff performance evaluation. Not much legacy has been produced yet due to the fact that the policies were adopted recently. KAA is, however, satisfied with the initial outcome of these rules and procedures, since they take into account all the aspects which derives from national law on civil servants but also the specifics of KAA. The main objective of these tools is to increase staff involvement in the works of the Agency, to carry out result-oriented management, to improve the effectiveness of each staff member, to increase the quality of delegation, responsibility, accountability, reporting, to develop the staff competency, to enhance the planning of the work etc.

6.5.3.   IT and Material resources

KAA has more than 32 all-in-one Desktops, and each employee is provided also a laptop. Projector, Smartboards (2), audio and video equipment, teleconferencing tools, and other software equipment are made available to each member of the staff, in order to ensure productivity.

KAA premises are located in the central part of Prishtina, close to the University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina" campus. KAA spaces are approximately 300 sq. m. which is an increase of almost 200 meters compared to the last evaluation. This increase reflects the growth of staff and the need for more workspaces.

KAA has established electronic platforms through which it conducts its works, each serving a specific purpose. First one is the e-Akreditimi, an enterprise resource planning (ERP) - like system and a multidisciplinary platform serving the process of accreditation and follow-up procedures. The platform helps 6 different actors (namely: the SCQ, KAA

secretariat, peer reviewers, HEI's, professors, students, and members of the industry with whom KAA collaborates) to communicate digitally, in accordance with their roles and responsibilities in the accreditation process. The platform ensures transparency, accountability, and integrity within the process. The platform has more than 3.000 users, and KAA is able to organize the accreditation process via the platform which helps our staff in regard to workload, efficacy, efficiency, transparency and accountability. The platform also serves as a tool to collect data, which helps the KAA to be provided with accurate data regarding the thematic analysis.

KAA's commitment to improving its work processes is also reflected in the projects supported by donors. With support of the Fulbright Specialist Program financed by the US Embassy in Prishtina, an US expert Dr. Trenia Walker conducted a feasibility study on the potential of digitalization of the KAA operations. As part of this initiative, HEIs were contacted to ask for their contribution to this project by providing feedback via a survey. The report on the digitisation feasibility study was completed in 2021 and is published in the KAA webpage.

Another concrete example is the HEI'25 Project, through which KAA has assessed the agency's needs with a focus on the digitization of accreditation processes in order to identify the need for intervention in an informed manner. KAA used the modified measuring Bruner Foundation instrument for evaluative thinking to conduct the needs assessment. To ensure a comprehensive approach to the assessment process, two separate workshops were held: one with KAA staff and the other with members of the State Council of Quality (SCQ) and members of the Appeals Committee. Also, the relevant documentation was analysed, and several meetings were held with the KAA Director to ensure that the evaluation process is relevant. The evaluation's findings clearly show that KAA should continue the digital transformation process that has started. This will increase the quality of the accreditation process and transparency and accountability to actors of higher education in Kosovo. Based on the assessment findings, concrete recommendations are given for how KAA can adopt information technology in the accreditation process and in its internal procedures.

6.6. Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

As in the higher education system in Kosovo, KAA promotes a culture of quality within the organisation itself. KAA strives to follow a systematic approach of internal quality improvement to achieve its goals and objectives. This includes the drafting and

implementation of a series of documents such as regulations, guidelines, and other policies through which KAA ensures that its external evaluation procedures and any other area of its operations are carried out in a qualitative manner and are subject to continuous improvement.

Continuous quality improvement in KAA is ensured by applying the PDCA (plan – do – check – act) cycle. The planning and implementation of external evaluation processes in a timely and regular manner, in addition to what is foreseen by the legislation in force, is a key indicator of the KAA's performance. On the other hand, data collection through the control, monitoring and review of internal procedures are prerequisites for continuous quality improvement.

KAA has worked on drafting a policy for the internal quality assurance of the KAA which establishes and formally describes KAA actions which are carried out in order to implement the PDCA cycle. This procedure aims to serve as KAA's main mechanism for internal reflection and is fully in line with KAA's commitment to establishing an operating system that is comparable to European quality assurance agencies.

Some of the actions that are already implemented by KAA and are further formalized in the Internal QA Policy of KAA include:

6.6.1.   Strategic Planning

KAA has approved its Strategic Plan 2021-2025 which serves as a basic document to determine the strategic orientation of its quality assurance processes in the higher education sector for the next 5 years (*see also under ESG 3.1*).

To implement the Strategic Plan, KAA has drafted a framework of detailed activities that contain clear deadlines and performance indicators. The strategic objectives of this plan are translated into annual work plans of KAA and are part of the regular evaluation and reporting of the KAA.

6.6.2.   Internal communication

KAA staff holds regular weekly meetings which usually last 1 hour. Even though KAA's administration is relatively small, these meetings ensure the continuous exchange of information among administrative officials. The staff discusses the progress of their processes, announce potential challenges encountered during their work, and coordinate to harmonise the agency's activities and practices where needed.

KAA also holds regular workshops with the administrative staff and the SCQ members. If resources are available, the workshops are done in the retreats and last several days. These workshops serve as a platform to discuss the challenges, opportunities for improvement, progress achieved towards the planned activities, etc. Solutions to the challenges are elaborated and new tasks are distributed if it is considered necessary.

6.6.3. Professional development of staff

KAA follows transparent and professional procedures for recruiting administrative staff, following the legislation in force. The required education qualifications, specific skills and previous experience are defined in the respective recruitment announcement. KAA has regularly employed staff holding a university degree, have experience in education management and are fluent in Albanian and English language.

Since the quality assurance processes are specific, KAA organizes on-the-job training held by one of the KAA senior administrative staff. Other professional trainings for continuous professional development are frequent. They are provided through internal workshops by international experts or through participation in study visits that are supported by donors or international projects.

6.6.4. Quality assurance of the accreditation process

The Accreditation Manual ensures the predictability of the accreditation process, includes detailed information on deadlines, defines HEIs' responsibilities towards the external evaluation process, and provides guidelines on the drafting of the self-evaluation documentation so that the process fulfils its purpose.

KAA aims to improve the quality of the accreditation process by ensuring that the following actions have taken place:

➢ the accreditation process is planned on time;
➢ the criteria and procedures for the selection of international experts are respected;
➢ the training and briefing of international experts is held;
➢ conflict of interest between the experts and the institution under evaluation is avoided;
➢ individual and collective meetings with higher education institutions are held before the start of each accreditation process;
➢ coordinators of the accreditation procedure for each institution under evaluation are appointed;
➢ continuous information with higher education institutions is exchanged at every stage of the external evaluation process.

KAA reviews and revises regularly the Accreditation Manual to ensure that it remains relevant and effective in addressing current challenges and changes within the higher education sector. More information about the update and review of the Accreditation Manual is provided under Section 2.2. Designing methodologies fit for purpose.

6.6.5. Reporting

As an agency for external quality assessment, KAA is accountable for its work towards all external actors. In accordance with the legislation in force, KAA prepares annual work

reports which are published on its [website](#). The same reports are sent to the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MESTI) and the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo.

In addition to its annual work reports, KAA has been subject to regular monitoring by civil society organisations in recent years, who also report on KAA's work on an annual basis. In 2018, KAA reached a cooperation agreement with KITU (Coalition for Integrity and Transparency in the University), which consists of several non-governmental organizations that advocate for improving the quality of education in Kosovo, focusing on increasing transparency and integrity. As part of this cooperation agreement, the Organization for the Improvement of Quality in Education (ORCA) monitors the SCQ's work to ensure the transparency of its decisions and prepares [annual reports](#). During 2023, ORCA monitored ten meetings of the SCQ and 11 meetings of the Appeals Committee.

6.6.6. Feedback from external stakeholders

The internal evaluation processes also contribute to increasing the transparency of the actions of the KAA towards the society in general. To this end, KAA aims to engage relevant actors, whose feedback serves as an important basis for informing KAA's policies. Feedback mechanisms include questionnaires and meetings with stakeholders such as higher education institutions, expert panels, students, employers, and the industry.

In 2024, the SCQ started with the new practice of holding meetings in the premises of higher education institutions in remote locations out of the capital city of Pristina. The occasion is used to bring the work of KAA closer to the higher education institutions and thereby increase transparency and de-mystify the role of KAA. The occasions of SCQ presence at the institutions is used also for meeting the senior management of the institution, exchange views and address the open questions.

KAA intends to systematically disseminate questionnaires with higher education institutions and the expert panels right after the accreditation procedures has ended. KAA is designing questionnaires for HEIs aimed at assessing the quality, regularity, and transparency of the accreditation process, starting from the application procedure, administration of accreditation documentation by KAA, planning, organization and implementation of the accreditation visit, as well as procedures after the completion of the accreditation visit. On the other hand, questionnaires with expert panels are intended to evaluate the planning, organization and implementation of the accreditation site visit, the support of the expert team by the KAA coordinators as well as the cooperation with peer members of the expert team.

KAA plans to disseminate questionnaires with students at least once per year, and questionnaires with employers once in two years respectively. Questionnaires with students are aimed at gathering a comprehensive and diverse range of perspectives on the quality of higher education institutions and the role of KAA in improving higher education. KAA

plans to disseminate the questionnaires to students who wish to participate voluntarily in surveys. KAA will require HIEs to submit a list of students and randomly select them from different academic programs, years of study, and demographic backgrounds.

Questionnaires with the industry will address the relevance of study programs vis a vis skills and competences gained from obtaining the degree and identify areas for improvement in curricula. While these questionnaires with the industry are not directly related to the internal quality assurance processes of KAA, they contribute to assessing how well the Kosovo HE system delivers.

In accordance with its strategic plan, KAA ensures that at least once a year it holds meetings with students, with various government actors, with line ministries, with business organizations, Chambers of Commerce, as well as individual employers, with whom it discusses the trends in higher education, the skills gap of graduates in the labour market, innovations in the labour market and therefore the adaptation of the programs to the rapid technological changes. In the last international conference held in September 2023, a panel discussion was dedicated to stakeholders. A student and employer were invited to discuss as panellists.

6.7. Cyclical external review of agencies

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

External quality assessment has been provided under the Administrative Instruction for Accreditation, article 3, paragraph 4, which stipulated that KAA is regularly subjected to external assessment. Also, the new Law on KAA, article 6 on Duties and Responsibilities of KAA, paragraph 1.13, determines that KAA is regularly subjected to external quality assessment by international quality assurance institutions in higher education.

KAA underwent an external quality review by ENQA twice. In 2014 which resulted with a positive decision to grant KAA full membership to ENQA and registration on EQAR, and secondly in 2019 which resulted with a negative decision to regain its full membership. KAA underwent an ENQA targeted review in September 2023.

External quality assessment is considered a vital process for KAA. Meeting the recommendations of the external evaluation and regaining full membership in ENQA and registration on EQAR have remained at the forefront of KAA's commitments. Since the last external assessment conducted by ENQA in 2019, KAA has worked tirelessly to fulfil ENQA's recommendations, which have substantially affected the quality of KAA's work. KAA has increased the transparency of its decisions, has advocated for the strengthening of its independence, has increased its cooperation with donors and international agencies, has introduced practices of data collection, has increased stakeholder engagement, etc. with the aim to reach substantial ESG compliance.

7. Opinions of Stakeholders

Stakeholders of KAA are considered institutions of higher education, students, international experts, MESTI, ASHAK, international donors, the Rector's Conference, NGOs dealing with higher education in Kosovo, Embassies, Chambers of Commerce, etc.

KAA involves mainly representatives of HEIs, students and NGOs in the drafting of policies/regulations/guidelines/legal acts by appointing them as members of the working groups. KAA also ensures that all above stakeholders in general contribute with inputs during public consultations of various documents. Public consultation of documents happens with the publication of the document on the KAA's website and sending the information to the stakeholders through emails about the possibility to comment or give inputs.

Discussion of documents can happen also in workshop types. Similar example is the workshop organised by the American Chamber of Commerce in Prishtina where KAA representatives discussed with private HEIs about the provisions of the new draft law on higher education. Another example is the discussion of the Kosovo Subject Area Code in a workshop that was held on held on 13.06.2022 with all representatives of higher education in Kosovo. KAA also organises meetings with the Rector's Conference where quality issues in higher education are discussed. Similar discussions have happened also with the entire higher education sector in Kosovo.

A good occasion to involve the stakeholders are also the KAA yearly international conferences where the most salient issues are debated within the Kosovar higher education community and the international guests. In the last conference that took place in September 2023 one of the three panel discussions was dedicated to the stakeholders and their involvement in higher education QA process.

While KAA has increased its communication and engagement with various stakeholders, it recognises that this engagement needs to be conducted systematically and formally based on its Strategic Development Plan. KAA also needs to collect systematic feedback from stakeholders, primarily from students, HEIs, and international experts, which feedback will contribute to the internal quality assurance procedures of KAA.

8. Recommendations and main findings from previous review and agency's resulting follow up

ESG	ENQA recommendations	KAA progress
3.1	Find as soon as possible HE-wide consensus and consequently decide on a KAA Strategic Plan, including solid activity plans with performance indicators and well-defined responsibilities, so as to prepare a sound basis for regular future activities.	In 2021, KAA adopted its Strategic Plan 2021-2025. Its drafting was preceded by a comprehensive consultation process with various stakeholders. The Strategic Plan includes clear strategic objectives, measures, action plans, and a framework for regular monitoring. In compliance with the Strategic Plan, KAA has drafted yearly activity plans that contribute to achieving the strategic objectives.
3.1	Involve students in the daily activities and the decision-making structure of KAA.	A major step towards increasing the involvement of students in the decision-making structure of KAA is the Law on KAA which foresees a student member in the State Council of Quality (SCQ) as a full member with a right to vote. The Law on KAA entered into force last year; therefore, the procedure for the student's appointment has not yet taken place. Besides this achievement, KAA has increased its attention to students by organizing meeting with them for multiple purpose. In addition, majority of working groups assigned for the drafting of legislation and regulations includes a student member. Students are as well invited in all other organisations of KAA, such as conferences, workshops, etc. In the last international conference held in September 2023, a panel discussion was dedicated to stakeholders. A student and employer were invited to discuss as panellists. To promote further the involvement of students in quality assurance procedures, KAA has implemented a project entitled "Increasing student participation in Internal and external quality assurance processes in Kosovo." The project aimed to encourage student participation in activities related to quality assurance which will contribute to improving the teaching and learning process. The project resulted in drafting a "Guideline for Student Engagement in Internal and External Quality Assurance of Kosovo Higher Education" and organizing two informative sessions with students to promote the guideline. In the new KAA Accreditation Manual, the participation of students in the process of evaluation (especially site visit) is further elaborated. Besides

ESG	ENQA recommendations	KAA progress
		the involvement of students, also student representatives should be invited.
3.3	In conducting evaluations according to the new procedures as described in the Accreditation Manual 2018 make sure that operational independence and independence of formal outcomes is guaranteed.	To ensure an independent State Council of Quality (SCQ), MESTI drafted a sub legal act which described in detail the procedures and criteria for the election of SCQ members (AI on the No. 06/2018 on the Criteria and Procedures for the Appointment of SCQ members). The election process has become transparent and is subject to scrutiny by external stakeholders such as civil society organisations. Most importantly this sub legal act, has defined clear procedures for the dismissal of SCQ members, particularly when a SCQ member qualifies as ineligible to continue to serve as a SCQ member. This particular provision has ensured that in order for the SCQ members to be dismissed a clear and transparent procedure has to be implemented and can happen only based on reasonable grounds.
		Another important step towards the strengthening of KAA's operational and decision-making independence is the Law on KAA adopted in June 2023. The law defines KAA as the main regulatory quality assurance agency in the Republic of Kosovo, with clear competences and responsibilities in its external quality assurance activities.
		Similarity to the AI for the Criteria and Procedures for the Appointment of SCQ members, the Law on KAA ensures the provisions that in order for the SCQ members to be dismissed a clear and transparent procedure has to be implemented and can happen only based on reasonable grounds.
		Prior to the approval of the Law by the Kosovo Assembly, the Government of Kosovo allowed KAA an increase of its administrative staff and freedom to design its administrative structure.
3.4	Use data collected during accreditation processes and other activities to carry our thematic and system-wide analysis in order to support further development of the HE system in Kosovo.	KAA has progressed towards this recommendation by developing initially a Guideline for conducting a thematic analysis. In addition, through the donor projects, KAA has drafted three thematic analyses. While the thematic analysis was produced mainly from international experts, members of KAA administration were continuously involved in the process, to employ the practices organized for such analysis.

ESG	ENQA recommendations	KAA progress
		The analyses are complemented by thematic international conferences organised on annual basis, whereby the salient issues are discussed with the higher education community, external stakeholders and international guests. KAA has yet to define and approve a Policy for Thematic analysis.
3.5	Take all necessary actions in order to assure adequate human and financial resources needed for conducting the activities expected from KAA.	In terms of human resources, KAA has progressed with the election of a permanent Director in 2020, and renewal of its mandate in 2023. In terms of number of administrative officers, KAA has increased its number of staff to 10 permanent officers. The Government of Kosovo has approved an increase of the number of administrative staff for KAA. This has resulted in the drafting of a new organogram, which foresees a total number of permanent employees of 32. The administrative structure of KAA will be organized into three central departments, namely the Department for Accreditation and Evaluation (11 officers), the Department for Monitoring and Post-Accreditation Procedures (8 officers), and the Department for Administration (11 officers).
3.6	In order to collect feedback KAA should increase and describe in documents the implementation of formal rather than informal mechanisms to create solid routines of internal quality assurance based on principles like closed-loop practices and the four-eyes system.	To address this recommendation, KAA has produced several documents in which the implementation of formal mechanism for internal quality assurance are described. To implement a consistent quality assurance system, KAA has produced a Policy on Internal QA, which serves as the KAA's main mechanism for internal reflection and improvement. KAA has lately introduced also meetings between staff and SCQ members whereby the quality and integrity of the structures, standards and procedures are addressed jointly and improved accordingly. E.g. the revised KAA Accreditation Manual (2024) and the Regulation for the Engagement of experts (2023) were drafted jointly with the support of external experts. This practice was the first step towards a regular internal stock-taking and QA process proposed by the SCQ.
2.1	Take care that in institutional and programme self-evaluations, in site visits and in review reports the ESG 2015 Standards Part I are addressed clearly.	KAA has initiated procedures for the assessment of its accreditation standards for institutional and program level (BA and MA level) and has subsequently revised them.

ESG	ENQA recommendations	KAA progress
		The new standards, which are organised within general areas of assessment, clearly indicate the ESG 2015 Part 1 in each of the standards. They aim at further consolidating and developing the internal quality assurance of HEIs and promoting quality improvement.
2.2	Make sure that during accreditation activities the workability of the methodologies is guaranteed.	KAA has revised the accreditation standards for institutional accreditation and accreditation of BA and MA study programs. The revision process has taken place with inputs collected from HEIs and other relevant stakeholders.

In addition to the BA and MA programs, in 2021 KAA has separately drafted the Regulation for the Evaluation of PhD programs, which contains standards for the accreditation of PhD programs.

Aiming to complement the accreditation cycle, KAA has drafted the Methodology for Follow-Up procedures and Monitoring. |
| 2.3 | Monitor and evaluate the implementation of accreditation activities from 2019 onwards thoroughly. | In the last five years, KAA has also regularly monitored the implementation of accreditation activities by producing annual reports summarizing the accreditation process. The reports include the number of applications, the number of site visits, the number of experts, the number of positive decisions, and the number of rejected applications, and all data are also available online. |
| 2.3 | Concentrate on quality improvement, when monitoring the follow-up of recommendations to HEIs provided by expert panels. | KAA has drafted the Methodology for Follow-Up procedures and Monitoring. It describes follow-up procedures, remote and field monitoring by KAA, and extraordinary monitoring procedures.

KAA aims to evaluate the progress the HEIs have made since the previous external evaluation having in mind the continuous enhancement of quality and institutional capacity building of the higher education sector in Kosovo. It foresees to implement the follow up procedures at least once within the accreditation procedure of each higher education institution and study program. However, until now, due to shortages of human resources, follow-up procedures are mainly checked at a systematic level by the expert panel in the next accreditation procedure. |
| 2.4 | Make sure that the level of degree-work can and will be judged properly by the expert panels. | KAA has improved the workload of experts engaged in accreditation processes. In the last three years, KAA has engaged three-panel members for institutional accreditation process, one of them being a student. Similarly for the study program |

ESG	ENQA recommendations	KAA progress
		level, KAA has engaged at three-panel members, one of them being a student.
2.4	Make sure that full students' participation in institutional reviews and program evaluations is guaranteed.	KAA has made substantial progress towards student involvement in accreditation processes. In the last three years, all expert panel involve at least one student. In the last revision of the KAA Accreditation Manual, the involvement of students was elaborated. A more representative sample of randomly chosen students is obligatory. Besides the students, in general also the student representatives must be involved.
2.4	Build a network of national experts, including students, in order to participate in activities such as monitoring of the follow-up of recommendations provided in review reports.	The current legal framework, including the new Law on KAA, foresees the participation of only international experts, limiting the possibility of Kosovar evaluators or students becoming part of the accreditation procedures as experts. KAA is planning to work on a model that allows the participation of local experts in its procedures, whilst ensuring that the provisions of the law are not breached.
2.5	Monitor how the existing rules for assessing standards and for decision-making work out in reality. If needed, improvements both in decision rules and by way of trainings, may have to be considered.	KAA has improved the existing rules for assessing standards and for decision making. They are described in the Accreditation Manual. KAA has also issued decisions to complement the Manual with specific criteria to be implemented by HEIs regarding the academic staff, such as requirements for the number of research papers. KAA has also worked on producing a "Kosovo Subject Area Code" which indicates clearly the suitability of academic staff qualifications with respect to the study program they are assigned as program holders.
2.6	Improve the quality of reports and make sure that they contain deeper analysis and a better connection with evidence and that the full reports are regularly published.	KAA has made substantial progress towards the quality improvement of evaluation reports. Since 2019, in line with the Guidelines provided for under the Accreditation Manual and its templates, all evaluation reports follow a uniform structure, and each standard of the general area are clearly judged by the expert panels. The newly revised Manual envisages a clearer instruction to the experts on how the report should be structured and sets more precise standards for drafting it. KAA has also increased its efforts to implement a validation procedure of the reports, to make sure that the general structure of the report is respected, the findings are sufficiently elaborated, and that

ESG	ENQA recommendations	KAA progress
		final recommendation is made based on evidence and aligns with the content of the report.

9. SWOT analysis

The working group assigned to draft the SAR of KAA, in regard to the SWOT analysis, has identified as:

Strengths:
➢ KAA is reputed for its extensive expertise in the development and implementation of effective educational quality assurance mechanisms;
➢ Full legal and operational independence in implementation of activities, consolidated fully by the Law on KAA;
➢ Strong support across the entire political spectrum for ensuring KAA's independence and status, culminating in the adoption of the Law in KAA;
➢ Performing of activities fully in line with the ESG 2015 and with reference to the European Qualification Framework;
➢ The Expert Panels are composed by international experts and students, therefore the risks of conflict of interest and incompatibility are minimised;
➢ The SCQ is composed by national, international members, student, KAA director and 2 employers' representatives. This structure is a guarantee for a robust blend of expertise, international and stakeholders' perspective on QA in higher education;
➢ Outcomes of all procedures and results of all activities are publicly available in English, enhancing international visibility of quality in Kosovo higher education;
➢ High participation in international projects including EU Projects and of other international donors;
➢ Continuous participation in international conferences, workshops, trainings etc., which results in highly professional and competent staff;
➢ Financial stability with sufficient resources in regard to providing staff trainings, equipment purchases, software purchases, etc.;
➢ Centralized processes via e-Akreiditmi software, which ensures efficiency, efficacy and transparency;
➢ Open minded management striving for innovation, reflecting in digitalization of processes as evidenced by its implementation of various electronic resources;

Weaknesses:
➢ The student member of the SCQ is yet to be appointed;
➢ KAA has increased the number of staff from 10 to 18 which is still not sufficient. With its new organizational chart, KAA has approved a number of 32 employees who are still in process of being recruited;
➢ High workload for staff, especially those working in the department for evaluation and follow-up procedures;
➢ Difficulty to ensure consistency on the expert panel reports despite providing strict guidelines and extensive trainings;
➢ Evaluation with only international experts sometimes poses difficulties in training and ensuring enough knowledge of the local system;

- Inability to establish a reward system based on performance in the public administration sector, which on the long term can affect the motivation and satisfaction of employees;
- Slow decision-making process when it comes to the appointment of new SCQ members, including students' and employers' representatives;
- Only initial phase of internal QA process – it needs to be further developed;

Opportunities:

- KAA is an institution with high flexibility in regard to changes, adapting and revision of policies;
- KAA has a high reputation inside and outside the country, resulting in awarding of a high number of projects, donations, grants etc.;
- Regaining membership in ENQA and registration on EQAR would further strengthen its status and its credibility, resulting in increased recognition of degrees from Kosovo;
- Possible future integration to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) / Bologna Process after Kosovo joined Council of Europe will further encourage the improvements in the quality culture and curricular improvements;
- Integration to the European Research Area will further encourage the development and enhancement of the research at higher education institutions;

Threats:

- HEI's opting for evaluation with foreign QA agencies due to lower threshold or lack of awareness of foreign agencies on the local context;
- Slow economic development might reflect in the quality of offered study programmes;
- Damaged reputation as a result of former political interference;
- Tendency for establishing new study programmes from HEI's despite not fulfilling the criteria;
- Low awareness of HEI's on the importance of QA processes which limits the agency in its mission for quality enhancement;
- Kosovo still does not have a centralized system providing data on market needs, which would facilitate the orientation of study programmes towards maximizing employment opportunities for its graduates;
- Due to a very deregulated system when it comes to the types of legal entities allowed to provide higher education (including for-profit companies), the necessity of strong QA as regulatory mechanism will keep the KAA busy with control-like activity instead of moving towards a more quality culture/enhancement approach.

10. Key Challenges and areas for future development

In recent years, KAA has been continuously engaged in identifying international best practices to improve its external evaluation processes and other processes of its work. KAA has been firmly committed to amending its external evaluation documents, regulations, and standards, has actively participated in international projects, has conducted numerous study visits to European quality assurance agencies, has promoted continuous dialogue with HEIs and the academic community, and has endlessly advocated strengthening its role as an independent decision-making agency in the higher education system in Kosovo. All these actions have substantially led to addressing recommendations from previous reviews and thus enhancing KAA's compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG).

Notwithstanding that, based on the results of several formal and informal self-assessments, it is considered that some areas still need further attention to be improved.

Regarding its internal quality assurance processes, KAA, in line with its strategic plan, needs to conduct formalized questionnaires with panel members and HEIs upon the completion of the accreditation process. It also needs to more systematically gather feedback from students and employers and integrate it to inform its policies and procedures.

In terms of human resources, while progress is made in increasing the number of staff, KAA needs to have a formal assessment of staff needs for professional development in place and, consequently, implement a staff development plan.

Whereas substantial progress has been made regarding drafting and implementing accreditation procedures that are fit for purpose, KAA still considers that it needs to distinguish standards for the initial accreditation of an HEI and its programs and the standards for the re-accreditation of programs and HEIs.

KAA must also consistently implement follow-up procedures in line with its Methodology of Monitoring and Post-Accreditation Procedures. KAA has initiated several monitoring procedures to accredited HEIs, however it needs to ensure that monitoring visits are carried for all programs within their accreditation period. In addition, more emphasis should be given on implementation of recommendations of the previous evaluations, especially where they address education process with curricular elements such as learning outcomes, assessment, student workload and teaching methods.

The standard on internal QA at the higher education institutions should gain in importance. This should be accompanied by raising quality awareness and capacity of the higher education institutions for the internal QA structures, standards and procedures. The QA system should encourage the institutions to take over full responsibility and the intensive care for assuring quality in pursuing their own mission, strategy and goals.

KAA has drafted a Guideline on drafting thematic analysis and has produced three thematic analyses so far through international support. However, KAA still needs to approve a policy for the drafting of thematic analysis that is consistently implemented. To this end, KAA also needs to increase the capacities of its administrative staff and data collection tools.

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11. Glossary of Terms

AC	Appeals Committee
ADA	Austrian Development Agency
ASHAK	Kosovo Academy of Sciences and Arts
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
HEI'25 Project	Higher Education Intervention 2025 – HEI'25
HERAS+	Higher Education Research and Applied Science Plus
KAA	Kosovo Accreditation Agency
KITU	Coalition for Integrity and Transparency in the University
LHE	Law on Higher Education
MESTI	Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation
NQF	National Qualifications Authority
ORCA	Organization for the Improvement of Quality in Education
QAINT	The Quality, Accountability, Integrity, and Transparency in Higher Education Project – QAINT
SCQ	State Council of Quality
WoS	Web of Sciences platform