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Overview of the Higher Education System in Kosovo

Kosovo Erasmus+ Higher Education Reform Experts
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This document has been an update of the comprehensive overview of the higher education system in Kosovo with inputs by the HERE team for the period 2022-2023:

Ajtene Avdullahi, Sejdi Sejdiu, Bujar Pira, Fisnik Korenica, Sinisa Ilic, - Higher Education Reform Experts (2022-2023)

Contributions by: Mimika Dobroshi – Coordinator of Kosovo Erasmus+ Office

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For further information:

Kosovo Erasmus+ Office Postal address: Sejdi Kryeziu no.49-Pejton 10 000 Pristina

Contact: office@erasmuspluskosovo.org

Website <http://erasmuspluskosovo.org/>

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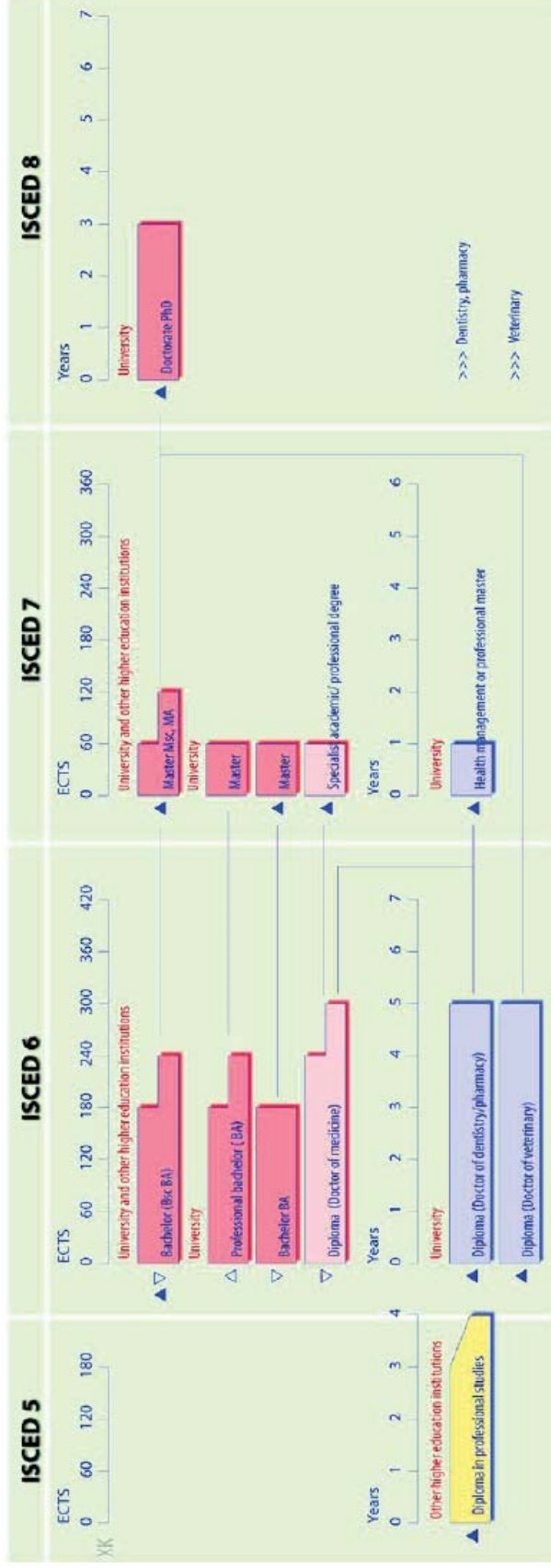
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Figure 1: The higher education system in Kosovo¹



¹ ISCED 5 Professional Bachelor 180 ECTS, in decline
 ISCED 6 Bachelor of the Arts (BA) 180 ECTS/240 ECTS, Bachelor of Science (BSc), 180 ECTS, Former Teaching Degrees (Professor), BA Education 180 ECTS
 BA Law (LLC) 180 ECTS, Professional Bachelor 180 ECTS
 Medicine Doctor MD 360 ECTS
 Architect 360 ECTS
 ISCED 7 Former Magistrature (Mag), Master of Arts (MA); Master of Science (MSc) Master of Business Administration (MBA), Former Engineering Degree (ENG) now Integrated Masters
 ISCED 8 Former Doctorate, PhD

1. INTRODUCTION

Kosovo is a landlocked country in the central Balkans. It has an area of 10,905.25 square kilometres (km²) and shares borders with Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro. With a population of 1,798,188 inhabitants in 2020, Kosovo is one of the most densely populated countries in Europe with 164.90 inhabitants per km² and with 61.7% of population living in rural areas for 2011 (KAS, 2021) Albanians comprise 92% of the population while other nationalities make up the remaining 8%, of whom Bosnians 1.6%, Serbs 1.5%, Turks 1.1 %, Ashkali 0.9%, Egyptians 0.7%, Roma 0.5%, and Gorani 0.6%, respectively. Ninety five percent of the population are registered Muslim followed by Orthodox Serbs and a minor Catholic Albanian group.

Kosovo has the youngest population in Europe with 42% below the age of 19 (Agjencia e Statistikave te Kosoves (ASK), 2018). According to the Law No. 02/L-37, the official languages in Kosovo are Albanian and Serbian (Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo)², however, other minorities have the right to their official language in municipalities where communities make up 5% of the total population of the municipality. Although it aspires European Union membership, Kosovo is the most isolated country in Europe, ranked the 99th in the Global Ranking Visa Restriction Index (Henley and Partners, 2020) with visa free access to only four countries in Europe (Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Turkey) and visa-free or visa on arrival access to 38 countries and territories worldwide.

Kosovo's GDP for 2018 was 7.94 billion dollars and GDP per capita 4,302. GDP growth was 4 % in 2019 and GDP percentage in all levels of education was 4.1 %. Participation of students in Higher Education is relatively high, amounting to 62,7% participation rate for students aged between 20-24 (Rexhaj & Pupovci, 2015). Expenditure per student ranges from 700 to 1200 euros. According to the Labour Force Survey (Agjenica e Statistikave te Kosoves (ASK), 2020)³, Kosovo has a low labour force participation of 40.5%. At the same time, Kosovo faces the highest unemployment rate in the region of 25.7% with 49.4% unemployment rate in the 15-24 years age group. The labour market is particularly difficult for young people, women and the poorly educated. While the employment rate of men is 46.2%, only 13.9% of the women of working age are employed. The high unemployment rate is Kosovo's paramount socio-economic problem with both immediate and long-term consequences.

²<https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2440>

³<https://ask.rks-gov.net/en/kosovo-agency-of-statistics/add-news/labor-force-survey-in-kosovo-2019>

1.1 Fundamental Principles and National Policies

The Law on Higher Education 04-L-037, (The Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, 2011)⁴ provides for the creation of autonomous higher education institutions (HEIs) in which members participate actively in the governance, management and quality assurance processes. The law governs licensing and accreditation procedures for public and private education providers and determines the role of the KAA and the National Qualification Authority (NQA). It also regulates the governance and denomination of the HEI-s and the award of academic titles. The law aimed at profound changes in the education structure by widening educational offerings and democratizing educational institutions, in which ownership, decision-making and accountability are shared among academic and management interests and responsibilities.

The vision for the Higher Education is outlined in the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP 2022-2026)⁵ (MASHTI, 2022). The vision of Kosovo Education Strategic Plan is: “Quality and inclusive education, which develops the potential and competencies of individuals, as well as encourages lifelong learning, in line with global transformation trends”. This strategy states that Kosovo’s priority is to develop a quality and inclusive education system that ensures equal access and participation in education for all children, pupils and students. Quality assurance in educational institutions and the improvement of teaching, learning and educational work are an integral part of Education Strategy. Therefore, improving organizational performance, improving forms of management in education and building a system of responsibility and accountability at all levels of education are prerequisites for quality in education.

The strategic goal 4 for Higher Education is: Improve the quality, integrity and competitiveness of higher education is formulated in response to structural shortcomings in the field of higher education and aims to improve the quality and integrity of higher education, through the implementation of the accreditation process in accordance with international quality standards (MASHTI, 2022).

1.2. Lifelong Learning Strategy

There is currently no separate Lifelong Learning (LLL) Strategy in Kosovo. KESP 2022-2026 emphasizes that sustainable economic and social development of the country is based on the opportunities created for the development of the full potential and necessary competencies of individuals. According to KESP, the provision of these

⁴<https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/06/02-ligji-per-arsimin-e-larte-anglisht.pdf>

⁵ <https://masht.rks-gov.net/en/education-strategy2022-2026/>

opportunities can be achieved through an education system that encourages the initiation of lifelong learning from early childhood education and covering all forms of learning: formal, non-formal and informal in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In Kosovo, lifelong learning has not yet found its proper implementation. The current focus is only on accelerated formal compensatory education, whereas adult education modalities that can be offered by vocational schools such as short-term courses based on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) are still unregulated and only 4 institutions have been accredited for RPL by the NQA (MASHTI, 2022). Data collection for adult education and lifelong learning still remains one of the main challenges as the capacity to collect and process developments in the non-formal sector is limited. In addition financial constraints is identified as a challenge as adult education mainly depends on continuous donor funding (MASHTI, 2022).

1.3. Organization of Private Education

Higher Education in Kosovo is evenly shared between public and private providers after an extensive increase in HEI in the last 15 years (MEST and ASK, 2017)⁶. Both public and private providers are accredited by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA). Non-public/private providers have equal rights according to the Higher Education Law. According to Article 11 of the Higher Education Law, HEI providers can be established by private companies, foundations and trusts, and undergo accreditation and licensing procedures set out in this law. The only difference lays in the establishment, statute approval process, financing, and organisation.

All HEI providers organize studies according to the Bologna three-cycle structure and apply ECTS credits, except for the RIT College. Undergraduate degrees require three years of study (180 ECTS), with the exception of law, Albanian literature, teaching degrees that require 4 years (240 ECTS); pharmacy degree that require 5 years (300 ECTS); and, the dentistry and medical degrees that require 6 years of study (360 ECTS). Master degrees last 1 to 2 years (60-120 ECTS) and doctoral degrees require minimum 3 years of study. The State Matura Exam is mandatory for enrolment in bachelor programs (level 6) and entrance exams are applied by a few private providers. For Master level studies, English Proficiency at B1 CEF level by recognised international tests may be required. Currently, doctoral programs are offered only by the University of Prishtina and the University of North Mitrovica.

⁶<http://www.akreditimi-ks.org/new/index.php/en/download/higher-eduacion-institutions>

1.4. National Qualifications Framework

The National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Authority are established by the Law on National Qualifications (Law 03/L-060) (The Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, 2008) ⁷. The National Qualifications Authority ⁸ has a Governing Board of 13 members drawn from relevant ministries, universities, social partners, non-governmental organisations, and private sector providers. This Board is responsible for strategic management of the NQF. The Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI, in Albanian Ministria e Arsimit, Shkencës, Teknologjisë dhe Inovacionit (MASHTI) is responsible for the management of general education qualifications, the NQA is responsible for vocational qualifications of all types, and the KAA for qualifications in higher education. The structure of the qualifications is described below and is compatible with the EQF, containing eight levels defined by statements of learning outcomes expressed in knowledge, skills and wider competences.⁹

Table 1: National Qualification Framework

⁷<https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/06/11-ligji-kualifikimeve-2008-03-l-060-en.pdf>

⁸⁸<https://akkks.rks-gov.net/>

⁹https://akkks.rks-gov.net/uploads/national_qualifications_framework.pdf

National Qualifications Framework				
NQF Level	Contains qualifications associated with			EQF ref. level
	Education programmes	Currently available qualifications (Type)	Potential work roles/occupational requirements	
8	Higher education - Bologna 3rd cycle (Doctorate)	Doctorate (A)	Entry to, or continuing professional development within, senior levels of management or higher level professional occupations	8
7	Higher education - Bologna 2nd cycle (Master)	Master degree (A)		7
6	Higher education - Bologna 1st cycle (Bachelor)	Bachelor degree (A)		6
5	Bologna short cycle and /or post-secondary VET	Title of qualifications still unknown (A), (C) Certificates of non-formal providers (D or E)	Specialist/Trainer/Manager	5
4	Preparation for progression into higher education and/or labour market entry	Matura diploma in general or vocational subjects (B), (C), Vocational education diploma (C)	Qualified Worker/Supervisor	4
3	Preparation for labour market entry (young people and adults)	Vocational education certificate (C) Certificates of non-formal VET providers (D or E)	Semi-skilled Worker	3
2	Progression from lower to upper secondary education (young people), preparation for labour market (adults)	No existing qualifications of formal education system identified Certificates of non-formal providers (D or E)	Low-skilled Worker	2
1	Basic education	No existing qualifications of formal education system identified Certificates of non-formal providers (E)	Minimum level of basic skills, inc. literacy/numeracy, required for entry to lowest level of employment	1

Source: National Qualification Authority

1.5. Statistics on Organization and Governance

Kosovo is a country that has large number of higher education institutions. In the academic year 2020/21, the higher education system in Kosovo consisted of 24 accredited higher education institutions, of which 9 public institutions and 15 private institutions (MASHTI, 2022). In this number is not counted the University of North Mitrovica that operates within the Serbian education system and offers programs in Serbian language.

In the academic year 2020/2021 there were 400 study programs offered Accredited higher education institutions in Kosovo, from which 236 study programs were of bachelor level, 156 study programs of master level and 8 study programs of PhD level (MASHTI, 2022).

According to MESTI statistics in education, in the academic year 2020/21, there were 95,335 students that attended their studies in accredited institutions of higher education in Kosovo (57.4% in the public sector, 42.6% in the private sector). Female student participation in higher education in general is at a satisfactory level as from the total number of students in the academic year 2020/21 more than half were women/girls students (58.5%). The youth participation in the total number of students of higher education in Kosovo was 56.3% (in the 18-22 age group). The biggest public university is the University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina” s, whereas the biggest private HEIs are the UBT College and the AAB College.

Table 2: New Enrolment according to the NQF levels in the academic year 2020/2021

KKK/NQF	Number of students in public HEIs	The number of students in private HEIs	Total	% per level
Level 5	0	44	44	0.2
Level 6	9,566	11,894	21,460	79.8
Level 7	3,129	2,260	5,389	20.0
Level 8	3	0	3	0.0
Total	12,698	14,198	26,896	100

Source: SMIAL, MASHTI, 2022

Table 3: New Enrolment according to Albanian and Serbian language in Public and Private HE Institutions in the academic year 2020/2021

KKK/NQF	Public HEI in Albanian and other languages	Public HEI in Serbian Language	Private HEI	Total	% per Level
Level 5	0	582	27	27	0.1
Level 6	6,969	1,195	14,606	21,575	72.7
Level 7	2,629	1,237	2,310	4,939	16.6
Level 8	82	47	0	82	0.3
% per Type of Provider	9,680	3,061	16,943	29,684	

Source: Information gathered by HERE Expert from the HEI in the Northern Mitrovica, Leposaviq/Leposavić and Zveçan/Zvečan

The only providers with international accreditation of programmes in English language are RIT Kosovo (A.U.K) College, and IBCM. The highest number of students enrolled in 2020 according to SMIAL data is in Business studies and Management Sciences (20.91 %), followed by Law (13.22%), and Engineering, Technology Sciences (11.19%).

As can be seen in table 3, the programs of Business Studies and Management Sciences remain the most attractive for female students of the academic year 2020/2021 (10.18% of the total number of students enrolled in 2020) followed by Social Sciences (8.34% of the total number of students enrolled in 2020).

Table 4: Enrolment of Students in Public and Private Higher Education Providers by ESAC area and gender 2020/21

Code	Erasmus Subject Area	Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
1	Agricultural Sciences	377	509	886
2	Architecture, Urban and Regional Planning	587	775	1,362
3	Art and Design	396	597	993
4	Business Studies and Management Sciences	2,886	2,739	5,625
5	Education, Teacher Training	155	1,347	1,502
6	Engineering, Technology	2,027	983	3,010
7	Geography, Geology	171	136	307
8	Humanities	176	152	328
9	Languages and Philological Sciences	417	1,036	1,453
10	Law	1,500	2,056	3,556
11	Mathematics, Informatics	1,092	380	1,472
12	Medical Sciences	634	1,713	2,347
13	Natural Sciences	51	183	234
14	Social Sciences	540	2,244	2,784
15	Communication and Information Sciences	153	280	433
16	Physical Education, Sport Science	428	176	604
Total/ All Subject Areas		11,590	15,306	26,896

Source SMIAL, MESTI 2022

In order to improve and enhance the quality of higher education in Kosovo, AKA has changed the standards that HE institutions in Kosovo must fulfil. These rapid changes

aimed at ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning is at the level of international standards, resulted in a slight decrease in the number of accredited HE in Kosovo. Thus, in the academic year 2022/2023 there are 21 accredited HE Institutions, 9 of them are Public Institutions and 12 are private.

According to KAA data, currently, there are 369 accredited programs in Higher Education in Kosovo. Among these accredited programs, 220 are at the Bachelor's level, 136 at the Master's level, 7 Dr/DVM Integrated, and 6 are Doctoral studies.

The University of Prishtina is the largest HE institution in Kosovo and in the academic year 2022/2023 has 117 accredited study programs. Of them, 52 are Bachelor, 56 are Master, 3 Dr/DVM Integrated and 6 Doctoral studies (KAA, 2022).

Other public universities have a total of 82 accredited programs at the bachelor's and master's levels, while none of them offer doctoral studies. University Isa Boletini in Mitrovica UIBM has 18 accredited programs, followed by the University of Peja Haxhi Zeka with 17 accredited programs. The Faculty of Islamic Studies offers 2 bachelor's programs and 1 master's program, while the Faculty of Public Safety offers only 1 bachelor's study program in Public Safety.

Whereas, in the private HE sector, UBT College leads with 53 accredited study programs (32 bachelor's, 19 master's, and 2), and AAB College with 50 accredited programs (33 bachelor's programs, 16 master's, and 1 Dr/DVM Integrated) (KAA, 2022).

1.6 Distribution of Responsibilities

Currently, the Kosovo Higher Education System is not a unified system across the territory of Kosovo.

- 1) The Higher Education managed exclusively by the Kosovo central government where the primary responsibility for education falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation, and the Higher Education Law (The Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, 2011). Accreditation is managed by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) for higher education qualifications for level 5, 6, 7 and 8. The main decision-making bodies at HEI are the Board, the Senate or the Academic Council. Universities and other HEIs are managed by a rector/president, vice-rectors/vice-presidents and a Secretary General each.
- 2) Higher Education extended competences granted to the North Mitrovica Municipality for managing higher education (The Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, 2008) whereby the Municipality of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica North is given the powers to exercise authority over the public Serbian language university, in accordance with applicable law of the Republic of Kosovo. The main

decision-making body of the University of Mitrovica¹⁰ is the University Council that is composed of representatives of the local government (6 members), representatives from the faculties of the University (10 members) and representatives from the student body (3 members). The university is managed by the Rector, vice-Rectors, the Secretary General, and the Student Vice-Rector.

In terms of quality assurance, the KAA exercises accreditation authority over all higher education institutions except for the University of North Mitrovica.¹¹ The University of Mitrovica is accredited by the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) in Serbia which was succeeded by the Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (NEAQA) in Serbia.

The Kosovo Law on Higher Education regulates KAA as an independent institution governed by a board designated as the National Quality Council (NQC) “consisting of not less than five to no more than nine persons appointed by the Ministry for a fixed term from among persons of both genders active in academic work in higher education and/or the professions within and outside of Kosovo, such that there are at least three persons (‘international experts’) not employed by any higher education provider in Kosovo”. The board members are ratified by the Assembly. The law stipulates that institutions and programs are reviewed based on internationally recognized standards by international evaluation teams subcontracted by the KAA. In reference to the University of Mitrovica, the legal requirement is that institutions are accredited by a recognised accreditation body which is defined in article 3.1.16.¹² All HEIs require licensing by MESTI.

¹⁰At present, the University of Mitrovica (with its ten schools/faculties: Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Medical Sciences, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Natural Science and Mathematics, Faculty of Technical Sciences, Faculty of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, Teachers' Education Faculty, Faculty of Sports and Physical Education, and the Faculty of Agriculture) continues to operate under the Serbian legal framework similarly to the three professional higher education institutions where the language of teaching is Serbian: the Higher Technical Professional School, Zvečan, the Higher Economic Professional School, Leposavic, and the Higher Technical Professional School, Urosevac-Leposavic.

¹¹<http://www.kapk.org>

¹² Recognized accreditation body -the Kosovo Accreditation Agency or any other accreditation body which, in the European Area of Higher Education, is in current membership of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) or (in the United States) is an accreditation body which has been recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), or by the United States Department of Education (USDE), or from both, or (in any other jurisdiction) has been accepted by the Ministry on a reciprocal basis as a properly constituted national or regional accrediting body, which is recognized and authorized by the relevant Ministry within that jurisdiction.

The KAA was a member of ENQA from 2014 to 2019 when it was removed from ENQA and EQAR for not fulfilling ESG standards.¹³ Similarly, CAQA (now NEAQA) was not a member of ENQA from 2014 till 2017. In 2020 the NEAQA following the ENQA review, was not successful in renewing membership for not fulfilling the requirements of ESG¹⁴. However, on October 3, 2022, the Board of ENQA decided to grant “affiliate” status to KAA. This new status in ENQA, created the opportunity for KAA to participate in the General Assembly of ENQA ¹⁵.

2. HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING

The financing of public universities is governed by the Law on Higher Education which stipulates the following funding sources:

- Allocations by the Ministry of Finance for teaching, scientific research and artistic work of general interest based on the approved budget;
- Tuition fees and other fees paid by students;
- Payments for commercial and other services;
- Donations, gifts and aids;
- Contracts with local, international, public and private bodies for teaching, research, artistic work and consulting.

Kosovo has no funding methodology or financing formula for higher education institutions, although the legislation defines the development of effective performance-based funding mechanisms. However, in 2022, the first concrete initiatives began. Based on the request of the Department of Higher Education and Science in May 2022, a working group was formed with representatives from MEST, as well as from HE Institutions in Kosovo, for the development of a roadmap regarding the implementation of education legislation related to the methodology of financing of Public Universities based on performance. At the end of November 2022, the Roadmap of the performance-based funding of public HEIs was developed in close cooperation between MESTI and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science, and Research, with the support of the HERAS Plus. It is expected that during 2023 preparations will begin towards a more efficient system in the Kosovar higher education sector based on performance funding, and it is hoped that the first financial contracts based on performance will be signed. Through performance based

¹³https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Letter-ENQA-to-KAA_Sep-2019.pdf

¹⁴https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Letter-ENQA-to-CAQA_190318.pdf

https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Board-letter_NEAQA.pdf

¹⁵ <https://akreditimi.rks-gov.net/en/2022/10/28/president-of-enqa-handed-over-to-the-director-of-aka-the-decision-on-the-new-status-of-the-accreditation-agency/>

financing, the aim of MESTI is to increase responsibility and accountability in public institutions of higher education (MASHTI, 2022).

The budget of public HEI is approved by MESTI and administered by the Ministry of Finance. Apart from the University of Prishtina, no other public HEI in Kosovo has a separate budget line under the budget law. They remain, however, within the MESTI budget and undergo very long administrative and financial procedures which puts these public HEIs at a disadvantage and makes them receive unequal treatment. While this method may have been justified in the initial stages of their establishment, it is now considered as an obstacle for university management. Most of the spending in higher education is allocated to the University of Prishtina (68.67%). Six other public higher education institutions account for 34.5% of spending in higher education. The total budget allocated to public higher education institutions in Kosovo in 2022 was 46,854,437 million euros.

The University of Mitrovica and three other professional higher education institutions where the language of instruction is Serbian are funded mainly by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia for the students enrolled on budgeted financing (up to the quota defined for each Faculty). Students that do not pass the qualification exam for budgeted financing, fund themselves from their own resources (as self-paying students) or through scholarships granted to them.

Concerning private HEIs, the Law on Higher Education does not stipulate provisions for the funding of private sector. Private HEIs generate their income mainly through: tuition fees, administrative fees and other fees incurred by students; payments for commercial services; funds from the Kosovo budget for teaching and scientific-artistic research of general interest; donations and gifts, etc.

2.1 Financial Autonomy and Control

The financing of public universities in Kosovo is regulated by the Law on Higher Education and the Statute of each institution of higher education. Public universities have established governance structures to operate autonomously. The Steering Councils and Rectors are responsible for financial planning and financial execution at university level. Universities have internal financial planning and execution procedures, which are set up in their statutes in compliance with the Higher Education Law. The Steering Councils are obliged to report annually to the MESTI on the financial implementation within a given fiscal year.

Public universities are subject to external audit by the General Auditor Office of the Republic of Kosovo which applies professional standards in the field of audit in accordance with applicable international standards.

2.2 Public Higher Education Fees

Tuition fees at the public universities are symbolic fees, 25 euros for the BA level, 150 euros for the Master level, and 500 euros for the PhD level, respectively. First-year students, students from families of veterans, and students from families receiving social assistance and families with two or more children are exempt by default from paying the fees. Based on the administrative instruction of MESTI number 09/2021, starting from the academic year 2021-2022, all students from all study years at the bachelor and master study levels. are exempted from paying the tuition fee for a maximum of two semesters during the study period, fees for admission exam and for each differential exam for study enrolment on Master level.

2.3 Private Education

2.3.1 Financial Autonomy and Control

As private higher education institutions are not financed by the MESTI budget or other governmental funds, they are not financially accountable to it. Private HEIs, however, undergo auditing procedures and other control from relevant tax authorities in Kosovo.

According to the Law on Higher Education, the licence for a private institution should include a provision for a financial guarantee to protect the financial interests of students in order for them to be able to continue studies at another accredited institution in case of closure of the institution... In addition, financial planning and management is a general area which is evaluated during the accreditation procedure. All institutions have to demonstrate that they have financial plans, which guarantee the sustainability of the study programs and their institutions in general. This, however, does not imply any financial control over them. This implies only a mechanism through which the KAA ensures that students are not disadvantaged in any way during the course of their studies.

2.3.2 Private Higher Education Fees

Private institutions are autonomous in deciding about their student fees. Usually, the fees for the BA level vary from 600 to 900 euros per year, whereas for the Master

levels the fees can be up to 1,100 euros per year. In both cases, the private sector allows students to pay their fees in monthly instalments, which means that, on average, a student pays 60 to 90 euros per month. Study programmes offered in medical fields are more expensive, and the fees may amount up to 3,500 euros per academic year.

2.4 Financial Support for Learners' Families

In the education system of Kosovo there is no institutional measure to support the learners' families. There are however different schemes for supporting students with various needs. Therefore, fee waivers were provided for newly enrolled and students from low-income families (social assistance schemes) and for students with special needs. Also, free access to dormitories and canteens is provided for these categories of students. Starting from the academic year 2021-2022, based on the administrative instruction of MESTI number 09/2021, all students from all study years at the bachelor and master study levels, are exempted from paying the tuition fee for a maximum of two semesters during the study period, fees for admission exam and for each differential exam for study enrolment on Master level.

Private Higher Education Institutions also have programmes for fee waiving. Students coming from social assistance schemes, families of war veterans, families with war invalids, etc. are usually exempt from payments.

2.5 Financial Support for Learners

Public universities have regular programmes of merit-based scholarships for excellent students in bachelor and master studies, for about 2% of the total number of students.

Scholarships are provided for students studying within the country and abroad. Scholarships for studies within the country include:

- Scholarships for vulnerable social groups (Students with special needs, underrepresented communities) - social dimension;
- Scholarships for outstanding students;
- Scholarships for STEM fields - specifically this scheme promotes women in STEM.

Whereas, scholarships for studies abroad include:

- Bachelor's and Master's scholarships for studies abroad in the top 100 Universities according to the Times Higher Education Ranking;

- Scholarships for doctorates in the top 500 Universities according to the Times Higher Education Ranking

Private higher education institutions also provide different types of scholarships to students, but they differ in types offered by public institutions. Usually, private institutions reduce tuition fees or waives them for students if they meet the criteria, but do not give monetary scholarships to students as public universities do.

3. THE STRUCTURE OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Higher education in the Republic of Kosovo is regulated by the Law on Higher Education (No. 04/L-037), adopted in August 2011. The higher education system in Kosovo operates through public universities and private higher education institutions (colleges, institutes, higher professional schools and academies). Only accredited institutions of higher education can offer study programmes that lead to a degree or diploma.

New public institutions of higher education can only be established by the decision of the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) which must be ratified by the Assembly of Kosovo. A new public or private provider of higher education offering higher education qualifications must undergo a preliminary accreditation process at the institutional and programme level before it is licensed by MESTI. The statutes of all institutions bearing the name “University” must be ratified by the Assembly, while the statutes of other types of HEIs have to be approved solely by the Minister of Education. All public universities in Kosovo have their statutes approved by the Kosovo Assembly.

Higher education is open to all students of Kosovo. After completion of upper secondary school, all students have to undergo the State Matura Exam, which is regulated by the Law on Final Examinations and State Matura Examination. Students who successfully pass the Matura exam and entry exam have the right to study at higher education institutions.

Although the Republic of Kosovo has not officially joined the Bologna Process, since the introduction of Bologna Reforms by the University of Prishtina in 2001/2002, all national legislations have served to better implement and make operational the Bologna reform objectives and principles in Kosovo. As a result of the implementation of these reforms in higher education, all institutions of higher education currently implement the ECTS credit system, the three-cycle degree system, student and staff mobility, the diploma supplement and a quality assurance system. The annual full-

time student workload in most of the institutions in Kosovo is adopted at 1500 hours, making one ECTS credit point equal to 25 hours of workload.

In terms of degree structures, higher education is organized in three cycles as in the table 5.

Table 5: HEI System, according to Cycle, Stages of education, NQF level and HEI Providers

HEI Cycles	Stages of Education/ Employment	NQF Kosovo (http://www.akk-ks.net/)	
		Level	
Cycle 1	Entry to professional graduate employment	5	Professional Bachelor Professional Certificate Post-Secondary Diploma
	Higher education and Advanced skills training	6	Higher Education Institutions (Colleges and Universities) Bachelor Degree Bachelor of the Arts (BA) honours, Bachelor of Science (BSc) Former Teaching Degrees (Professor)
Cycle 2	Professional or postgraduate education, research or employment	7	Public and Private Higher Education Institutions (Colleges and Universities) Master Degrees Former Magistratura (Mag) Master of Arts (MA); Master of Science (MSc) Master of Business Administration (MBA) Former Engineering Degree (ENG) now Integrated Masters
Cycle 3		8	Public and Private University Colleges and Universities Former Doctorate, PhD

- First Cycle (NQF Level 6) – three (3) to four (4) years of studies in which the student accrues 180 or 240 ECTS, respectively, and obtains a Bachelor Degree.
- Second Cycle (NQF Level 7)– one (1) to two (2) years of studies after completion of the first level in which the student accrues 60 or 120 ECTS, respectively, and obtains a Master Degree.

- Third Cycle (NQF Level 8)– a programme of doctorate studies with an academic and independent research scientific character. Doctoral studies take a minimum of 3 years of study or 180 ECTS.
- Any other post-secondary education at level 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, for which credits may be given (ECTS).

3.1 Types of Higher Education Institutions

According to the Law on Higher Education, higher education institutions are classified in the following categories:

- **University** is an institution of higher education which offers educational, scientific, research/artistic and professional programmes in at least five different subject areas and which has produced at least one graduate with an accredited doctorate in each of these programmes.
- **University College** is an institution of higher education which offers Bachelor, Master and Doctoral studies in at least three study areas. University Colleges offer professional and academic oriented programmes.
- **College** is an institution of higher education which offers professional or academic programmes at Bachelor and Master levels.
- Higher professional schools offer professional courses in one or more professional fields at the Bachelor level, including programmes at level 5 according to NQF.
- **Academies** provide higher education and creative activity in specific areas of arts, sports or other professional areas at Bachelor and Master levels, including programmes at level 5 according to NQF.

3.2 First Cycle Programmes

Bachelor programmes are offered in all types of HEIs and take 3 to 4 years (180 - 240 ECTS credits). A Bachelor thesis is required at most of the Bachelor programmes. Depending on the discipline, accredited Bachelor programmes can lead to a Bachelor of Sciences (BSc.), Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Law (LL.B.), Bachelor of Engineering (B.Eng.), Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.), or Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.).

3.2.1 Branches of Study

The main branches of higher education studies according to ESAC are the following:

- Art and Design;

- Business studies and management sciences;
- Engineering and Technology;
- Law;
- Social Sciences; etc.

3.2.2 Admission Requirements

After completion of upper secondary school, all students have to undergo the Matura exam, which is regulated by the Law on Final Examinations and the State Matura Examination. Students who successfully pass the Matura exam have the right to apply to enter higher education.

All HEIs organize entrance exams that are usually organized in two periods of time, in June and in September (the latter applies only to academic units of universities which have not reached the quota of foreseen students). Quotas of students are proposed by universities and are approved by the MESTI. The ranking of students is based on the score from the Matura exam and admission exams' results.

Students are admitted to Bachelor studies only after successful completion of the Matura exam. The quotas are determined by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency.

3.2.3 Curriculum

Curricula in the majority of higher education institutions for Bachelor studies are organized in 3 years and only in a small number of cases in 4 years. BA programs that the University of Mitrovica offers last for 4 years. Curricula of HEIs are evaluated and accredited continuously by the Accreditation Agency and therefore are largely harmonised with the curricula of European Universities. All curricula indicate the number of mandatory subjects, the number of elective subjects, the number of teaching hours and exercises (seminar classes), the number of ECTS, calculation of ECTS, and the names of professors. Most importantly, all HEIs must clearly describe the learning outcomes for every module.

3.2.4 Teaching Methods

There are strict requirements that teaching methods should be clearly described for every module based on learning objectives and quality assurance of the HEI, particularly when HEIs undergo external evaluation by the Accreditation Agency. HEIs must describe the teaching and learning methods, the evaluation methods and

criteria to pass, the ratio between the theoretical and practical part of teaching, and the basic literature to be used in each module. At public universities, based on the internal rules and specificities, lectures are organized in large groups of students or small groups with a minimum of ten students, depending on the field of study. Subjects are delivered through lectures, exercises (seminar classes), classwork, lab work, presentations, and seminar papers.

3.2.5 Progression of Students

Progression of students from one year to another depends on the HEI statutes and academic by-laws (study regulation). For example, students of the University of Prishtina can transition from the first year to the second year, only if they have completed 9 out of the total 10 courses. If students fail to pass exams, they do not usually need to register the courses again and attend lectures, but they are given the right to attend the exam in the upcoming examination term. Students can attend lectures of the second year. However, in the public universities, students cannot take second year exams unless they have completed 9 out of the 10 first-year subjects. Students registered in three-year-long Bachelor programmes, have to complete their studies within a maximum of six years. Otherwise, they will lose the status of students. In public universities, Bachelor degrees are completed with a Bachelor thesis which students have to defend in front of a Commission. Rules and regulations concerning the Bachelor thesis are laid down in the statutes of each HEI and are subject to an evaluation by the appointed commission consisting of the academic staff. Only after the successful completion of a Bachelor degree, students can register for Master studies. However, students with 180 ECTS Bachelor degrees cannot enrol at some Academic Units of Universities for Master studies which require students to have completed a 240 ECTS Bachelor degree, such as in the case of the Faculty of Education.

3.2.6 Employability

There is no formal regulation at national level concerning the employment of students after their graduation. This depends on each HEI and how they have organized this issue with companies (e.g. how many cooperation agreements they have with companies). Frequently, all HEIs send their students for internships at private companies or public institutions, depending on their field of studies, and depending on the number of ECTS that are required with the curricula.

In some education branches, however, the relationship with the employers is more advanced mainly with programmes offering certain competences i.e. in business management or the IT sector.

3.2.7 Student Assessment

Assessment methods are usually prescribed in every course syllabus and are delivered to the students during the first week of the semester. The most common forms of assessment of students are written exams and coursework.

Assessment methods depend largely on disciplines, subjects, and courses, and vary a lot from practices and research projects to colloquiums (tests) and oral exams. However, mid-term exams are organized consisting of 50%, and other elements are taken into consideration such as attendance of students with usually 10%, a Paper presentation with usually 20%; seminar papers with usually 20%. Student grades range 5 (fail) to 10 (excellent). The numerical scale of student grading and its comparison is shown on the table 6.

Table 6: The numerical scale of student grading

NUMERICAL SCALE		
10	A	Excellent
9	B	Very good
8	C	Good
7	D	Satisfactory
6	E	Sufficient
5	F FX	Fail

3.2.8 Certification

Higher Education institutions have the right to award degrees. Students receive their degree after completion of the studies, including all record concerning the study programme attended, the academic degree, the ECTS reached, the level according to the National Qualifications Authority. Students can also receive diploma supplements.

3.3 Short-Cycle Higher Education

Within the public higher education system there are no short cycle programmes. However, there are a few short-cycle study programmes accredited at private HEIs, consisting of 120 ECTS and they are oriented to professional studies. After the completion of this study programme, students receive a Certificate instead of a Diploma and therefore these students are not able to enrol at standard Master programmes.

3.4 Second Cycle Programmes

In Kosovo, Master programmes last commonly 2 years (120 ECTS credits) but can also last 1 year (60 ECTS credits) depending on the length of the Bachelor studies. Master programmes can be provided at Universities, University Colleges and Colleges. The University of Prishtina offers accredited Master studies in 65 different programmes.

A Master thesis dissertation is required in all master programmes. Accredited Master programmes, depending on the discipline, can lead to a Master of Science (M.Sc.), a Master of Arts (M.A.), a Professional Master, a Master of Laws (L.L.M), a Master of Engineering (M. Eng.) or a Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.).

3.4.1 Branches of Study

Studies at the Master level can be either academic studies or professional studies.

The main branches of higher education studies according to ESAC are:

- Art and Design;
- Business studies and management sciences;
- Engineering and Technology;
- Law;
- Social Sciences; etc.

3.4.2 Admission Requirements

In order to enrol in a Master programme, students need to have completed a Bachelor degree. Students who have completed a three-year study programme with 180 ECTS enrol in a two-year Master study programme (120 ECTS). Meanwhile, students who have completed a four-year study programme with 240 ECTS enrol in a one-year Master programme (60 ECTS).

Public universities as foreseen in their statutes and study regulations, may organise entrance exams for students. Quotas of students are proposed by Universities and are approved by the MESTI. The ranking of students is based on the results of the exams.

Only a few private institutions of higher education organize entrance exams. Usually, the students are admitted to Master studies only after the successful completion of a Bachelor degree. The quotas are determined by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency.

3.4.3 Curriculum

Curricula for Master studies are organized in two (2) years study programmes in most higher education institutions, and only in few cases in one (1) year. MA studies at the University of North Mitrovica last for two semesters (1 year), the only exception being the Faculty of Medicine which has integrated academic studies of BA and MA (4+2). Curricula are evaluated and accredited continuously by the Accreditation Agency and therefore are largely harmonized with curricula of European Universities. All curricula should indicate the number of mandatory courses, the number of elective courses, the number of teaching hours (lecture classes) and exercises (seminar classes), the number of ECTS, the method for calculating the ECTS, and the names of professors. Moreover, all HEIs must clearly describe the learning outcomes for every module.

3.4.4 Teaching Methods

In contrast to the first cycle studies teaching methods in the MA programmes differ largely. Teaching methods at the Master level emphasize theoretical knowledge, independent research, individual and team work, mentorship and coaching in a form of seminars and research projects. Textbooks and advanced literature are used, including audio /video tools. The teaching and learning methods, evaluation methods and passing criteria reflect the ratio between the theoretical and the practical part of teaching and the literature to be used in each module. At public universities and private education institutions lectures are organized in smaller groups in comparison with Bachelor programmes.

3.4.5 Progression of Students

Just like at the first cycle of studies, students at the MA level in public universities can transition from the first year to the second year only if they have completed 9 out of 10 courses. If students fail to pass exams, they do not usually need to register course again and attend lectures, but they are given the right to enter (re-sit) the exam in the upcoming examination terms.

3.4.6 Employability

Though there is no formal regulation at national level concerning the employment of students after their graduation, most of the students attending MA studies are already employed or have already started their internships. Some of the public higher education institutions have initiated negotiations with public and private organizations leading to memorandums of understanding for placements of students for practice, while at some private higher education institutions this cooperation is already an established practice.

3.4.7 Student Assessment

Assessment methods are usually explained in the syllabus corresponding to each course, which is provided to the students in the first week of the semester. The forms of assessment of students are exams, mid-term exams, seminar papers and evaluation of research projects. Students are expected to carry out a research project based on which they can receive a passing grade. Student grades range from 5 (fail) to 10 (excellent).

3.4.8 Certification

Higher Education Institutions issue the degrees to their students. Students receive their degree after completion of the studies, with all information (record) concerning the study programme attended, the academic degree, the ECTS accrued, the level according to the National Qualifications Authority. Students can also receive diploma supplements.

3.5 Programmes outside the Bachelor and Master Structure

Programmes outside the Bachelor and Master structure are only study programmes in specific fields and correspond to the so-called integrated study programmes (Faculty of Medicine and Faculty of Veterinary and Agriculture). These study programmes consist of 5 years with 300 ECTS/ 360 ECTS. After completion of these studies, students can continue their PhD studies.

3.6 Third Cycle (PhD) Programmes

3.6.1 Organization of Doctoral Studies

Postgraduate or doctoral levels are programmes with an academic and independent research scientific character. The duration of this cycle is at least 3 years or 180 ECTS. All students who have collected at least 300 ECTS in previous studies can enrol in doctoral studies. Exceptions to this study scheme are studies in medicine, dentistry, pharmacy and veterinary medicine which are organised in an integrated form (300-360 ECTS). After completion of these studies, students qualify to enrol in doctoral studies.

According to the Law on Higher Education, Universities and University colleges can offer PhD studies. The University of Prishtina is accredited for offering PhD studies in 17 programmes. Also, the University of North Mitrovica offers accredited PhD studies. Private Higher Education Institutions are not yet accredited to offer this level of

studies. Kosovo Accreditation Agency has also approved the standards for accreditation of PhD programmes and all institutions interested to organise these kind of studies have to undergo an accreditation process with these standards.

3.6.2 Admission Requirements

PhD admission requirements are specified in the statute of the Universities. A public announcement is made by the Universities. Students eligible for admission are graduates with a Master degree in the respective area and graduates from integrated medical programmes (5 – 6 years).

3.6.3 Status of Doctoral Students/Candidates

All students who have finished a Master degree can apply for enrolment in Doctoral studies.

3.6.4 Supervision Arrangements

According to the statute of Universities, the student proposes the mentor/advisor and the research topic and a commission (panel) for thesis assessment are appointed within one month after the student has submitted his/her proposal. The mentor shall be selected among full professor and associated professors of the respective area, and he/ she should be a full-time staff of the University. Students may propose a co-mentor from another University as well.

At the University of Mitrovica only teachers with 3+ research papers published in high ranking scientific journals (SCI list) can teach t students in PhD programmes, and the mentor may be selected from amongst professors with 5+ research papers published on the SCI list.

3.6.5 Employability

There is no formal regulation at national level concerning the employment of students after their completion of studies at the Doctoral level.

3.6.6 Assessment

Students are asked to do individual / and group research independently, during which the students will demonstrate their creativity and critical thinking. Students will produce a research paper, which will be the basis for their evaluation. During the preparation of the research paper, students will be required to make a short

presentation in class regarding the research topic, which will be discussed with other students. The research thesis should be original and creative using various sources (and prominent authors). These two criteria will be the basis for assessing the quality of the research paper. The topic of the research papers is selected in cooperation with the professor of the course. The format of the papers must meet the contemporary requirements of scientific standards.

At the University of Mitrovica PhD student may submit draft of the PhD dissertation only if he/she already published at least one research paper related to the topic of dissertation in the high ranking scientific journals (that belong to SCI list).

3.6.7 Certification

Higher Education Institutions issue the degree to their students. Students receive their degree after completion of studies, with all information (records) concerning the study programme attended, the academic degree, the ECTS accrued, the level according to the National Qualifications Authority.

4. TEACHERS AND EDUCATION STAFF

4.1 Initial Education for Academic Staff in Higher Education

According to Administrative Instructions and Statutes of HEI's, staff recruited to teach at HEIs should have "the specific areas of expertise, qualification and experience for the positions they occupy". In practice, Higher Education teachers are not required to undergo any licensing procedures as MSc and PhD qualification alone are considered for the teaching positions in all HEI in Kosovo. The Higher Education Law set the academic titles that each HIE can award to its staff while the statutes of HIE regulate specify the criteria to each of the academic titles they require.

For accreditation of programs, the KAA checks minimum standards specified as one PhD for 60 ECTS, thus requesting 3 PhD-s for one Bachelor program with a maximum three profiles, 2 PhDs for one Master programs and 3 PhDs for Doctoral Programs (Administrative Instructions no.15/2018 for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Kosova, 2018). Any additional profile in one programme requires one additional staff with a PhD to be accredited.

4.2 Conditions of Service for Academic Staff Working in Higher Education

Employment is regulated through the Labour Law No. 03/L-212; (The Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, 2010) and other accompanying laws. The Labour Law regulates terms of contract as definite and indefinite, specifying persons working for more than ten (10) years in an institution should be given a contract for an indefinite period of time. The Law specifies a minimum number days of annual leave (four weeks), a minimum salary which is set annually by the Government of Kosovo and Socio-Economic Council (SEC), and minimum break periods (30 minutes).

Academic Tenure is regulated by Higher Education Law. Article 26 (The Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, 2011).

Academic titles for universities and university colleges include:

- Full Professor;
- Associate Professor;
- Assistant Professor;
- University Assistant.

Academic title for other HEIs include:

- Professor;
- Assistant Professor;
- Lecturer;
- Assistant Lecturer.

The title Lecturer and Lector (lektor, in Albanian) is not foreseen explicitly in the Law however, as the article 26 paragraph 12 of Higher Education Law allows the HIE to give specific education titles as per their needs.

Each category has qualification and publication requirements. Some categories have additional age limit in the statutes of HEIs. For example, teaching assistant in some of the HE institutions have an age limit of 30 years and in some 35 years. Meanwhile, other teaching positions in some of the HE institutions have an age limit for initial appointment of 50. At the same time, although retiring is done by default at the age of 65, additional service is allowed beyond that age in some cases. All provisions regarding age limitation mostly affect women.

Conditions of service for academic staff is done in two forms commonly referred as contract for full-time staff and part-time staff, formally regulated in the statutes of HEI or contracting documents. Part-time staff is also referred in contracting documents as Contract for Engagement as adjunct staff. The terminology full-time and part-time staff is also used in the Higher Education Law and for accreditation of higher education institutions and programs where full- time staff is considered one

that has a workload of 40 hours a week (amounting to approximately 6-8 teaching contact hours per week or teaching two courses per group for a semester). Full-time staff are entitled to 12 monthly salaries per year and other rights for paid leave. Part-time staff is considered by the KAA any teaching staff enlisted who declared the relevant HEI as their secondary employer. However, the same regulation allows for additional 20 hours' workload in another institution.

Until 2019, conditions of service and workloads were not monitored by MESTI, allowing for overtime within the HEI and multiple employment of HEI Staff in other HEI and other public institutions. Multiple employment and lack of supervision for staff workloads has directly influenced the quality of hiring and the opening of new positions. The situation was so alarming that the KAA has developed a procedure which requests teachers to declare teaching workloads and primary and secondary employers, and afterwards confirms declared data with tax administration. The new Law on Salaries in Public Sector does not allow more than one employment in the public sector and teaching staff can receive only 20% of the salary for engagement in a second institution.

4.2.1 Planning Policy

An increasing number of HEIs has resulted in an increased demand for PhDs to cover minimum programme requirements. There was no specific planning at MESTI, although in the last decade alone 6 public institutions have been established. At the same time, public HEIs have a limited number of open positions resulting in an increased workload for current teaching staff.

According to ASK (2022) the fields of Business, Administration and Law are the most popular choice of the study fields for new students with 28.1% in Bachelor studies and 37.2% in Masters studies. Furthermore, in education studies, there is a large gender difference between male and female students where 92.6% of new students are females. 27% of new student are enrolled in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programmes, or to me specific: Natural sciences, Maths, Statistics, ICT, Engineering, Production and Construction study fields, which is pretty much the same percentage as in 2020-21 academic year.

Most of the universities should employ more professors in order to increase the quality of teaching and thus fulfil the Kosovo Education Strategy 2022-26 that foresees the ratio of 1 professor for 30 students (1:30) in public HEIs. Considering the staff to student ratio in public HIEs as of 2011 was 1:40 (ASK, 2021) in order to achieve its target of 1:30 public HIE have to increase the number of its academic staff

by 32.5%. MESTI and the Kosovo Government should support with provision of additional budget and staff allocations to public HEIs if this target is to be achieved by 2026.

4.2.2 Entry to the Profession

Appointments of academic staff are done by HEI institutions through their academic bodies. In public HEIs there is a two-level selection process, at the academic unit (Faculty) and at the University Senate. In private HEIs, recruitment is done by a selection committee after a short listing and interviewing process.

4.2.3 Professional Status

Senior academic faculty are not considered to be civil servants in Kosovo. The conditions of their employment are determined in the Higher Education Law regarding academic titles and Law of Public Officials for public HEIs and the Labour Law for Private HEIs.

4.2.6 Promotion, Advancement

Public HEIs in Kosovo may appoint the following categories of academic staff:

- Full Professor,
- Associate Professor,
- Assistant Professor,
- Lecturer,
- Korepetitor
- Lector and
- Assistant.

Private HEIs in Kosovo appoint teaching staff with the academic title of 'Lecturer' too. The assessment/review procedure for or appointment to the academic title is based on the following criteria:

- Qualifications;
- Research, scientific and professional publications;
- Service activities for the benefit of University, Faculty, and the community at large.

Full Associate and Assistant Professors should have completed a Doctorate degree and published a certain number of papers in peer-reviewed international journals (the criteria may vary slightly depending on particular regulations of HEIs).

Full Professors and Associate Professors should also be able to demonstrate successful academic leadership of Master and PhD theses, ability in curriculum design, pedagogic innovation, research and publication.

They should have an extensive amount of published scientific/scholarly papers or other publications of considerable scientific relevance in their field of expertise, along with other contributions to science and higher education quality.

A visiting professor from a foreign higher institution may be employed without a recruitment procedure.

Other providers may appoint the following categories of staff: Professor; Assistant Professor; Lecturer and Assistant Lecturer. The criteria for all titles except for Assistant and Lecturer shall include at least a PhD degree or its equivalent in the scientific area of the nominee.

Most commonly, the higher education academic staff is employed on a full-time basis. However in Public HEIs, the duration of their employment may vary in accordance with their respective titles:

- Teaching assistants and lecturers: fixed-term employment for 3 years;
- Assistant Professor: fixed-term employment for 4 years;
- Associate Professor: fixed-term employment for 4 years;
- Full Professor: permanent position.

4.2.4 Salaries

Salaries in the public HEIs until 2022 were determined by the Steering councils of each public HEI, through were kept at the same level between all public HIEs. In 2022, salaries for all public sector employees, including HEI are provisioned by the Law on Salaries in Public Sector (2022). With the approval of this law, salaries in the public HEI will be regulated with coefficient ranging from 6.4 for the lab technician to 12.4 for the Full professor. Since the value of coefficient is not approved during 2022, based on some analysis, it is expected to be between 100-110 Euros. If the one takes the average value of 105 Euro per coefficient, the Salaries of all academic staff will be reduced significantly as shown on the table 7.

Table 7: Academic staff salary according to current and new predicted range

Academic title	Current Salary range	New Coefficient	New Predicted Salaries	Difference
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Full Professor	€1,429.54 - €1,486.72	12.4	€1,302.00	- €184.72
Associate Professor	€1,283.34 - €1,334.67	11.4	€1,197.00	- €137.67
Assistant Professor	€1,137.14 - €1,182.63	10.4	€1,092.00	- €90.63
High School professor¹⁶	€1,137.14	n/a	n/a	n/a
Lecturer	€990.00 - €1,030.58	8.6	€903.00	- €127.58
Lector	€844.73 - €878.52	7.5	€787.50	- €91.02
Korepetitor	€878.52	7.5	€787.50	- €91.02
Assistant	€772.50 - €803.40	6.6	€756.00	- €47.40
New Assistant¹⁷	€698.75	6.4	€693.00	- €5.75

This reduction could have a multiple effect on the academic staff of Kosovo Public Universities in a form of:

- reduction on their job motivation,
- increased intention to quit the public sector in favour of the private (academic and non-academic sector), and
- leaving Kosovo all together for a better perspective abroad.

In addition to the reduction of the salaries among public HIE (Universities), this law, with this expected value of the coefficient, will significantly reduce the Functional allowances for university management as well. Within the Law on Salaries in Public Sector, the a Rector has a coefficient of 14.2 and if one takes the previous value of the coefficient of 105 Euro, a gross salary of 1,491 Euro, and compared to the new Full Professor salary, the new functional allowance is 189 Euro. For the Vice-Rectors, the coefficient is 13 and if one uses the 105 Euro value of the coefficient, compared to the Full Professor salary, the new functional allowance is 63 Euro. This continues also for the Deans, and Vice-Deans. These functional allowances will be very discouraging for member of academic staff to take managerial responsibility, (especially the most senior academics) and with it risking the stability and quality of the leadership in Public Higher Education institutions in Kosovo.

4.2.5 Working Time and Holidays

¹⁶ High School Professor is an academic title issued to staff engaged in teaching in High Schools as academic units of University of Prishtina (currently only present in UMIB)

¹⁷ New Assistant is a title under the old statute at UP and remains there for the remaining academic that still hold this title

Full time employees work 40 hours per week with all other specificities being determined by their contract and class schedules, issued by the higher education institution. The institution determines the structure and schedule of teachers' annual and weekly obligations. Staff members are entitled to a minimum of 20 vacation days per year, which are used up during collective holidays and breaks which are determined by the academic year calendar. A staff member may use paid absence days in situations determined by the institution (professional development, conferences, illness, maternity leave etc.).

4.2.7 Retirement and Pensions

Conditions and criteria for recognition of the right to age contribution (payed pension) is regulated by the Labour Law financed by the Government. The retirement age for academic staff is sixty five (65) years. However, a retired professor may be assigned the title 'Professor Emeritus', through a process approved finally by the University Senate, which would give him/her the right to teach and engage in scientific/scholarly work until the age of 70. But, the number of academic staff that can be (and has been) promoted to Professor Emeritus is very small. Retired professors can be allowed to teach on (on part-time contracts) until they are 70 years old in cases of dire need for their expertise and services.

4.3 Continuing Professional Development for Academic Staff Working in Higher Education

HEIs have staff development plans and earmarked budget for staff development with equal opportunities for all staff. However, there is no clear marked budget at the Ministry level for professional development for HEIs. Most of staff capacity development is done through the Erasmus + Programme.

Higher education institutions provide limited CPD for teaching staff and HEI teaching staff.

The publication of scientific/scholarly papers continues to be the most relevant factor in the promotion of the academic staff. The University of Prishtina requires that its academic staff -- in order for them to be promoted - must attend certified basic and advanced training offered by the Centre for Teaching Excellence (CTE) a University of Prishtina-based institution. These trainings contribute to academic staff professional development with regards to the improvement of pedagogical aspects in teaching and learning. Other HEIs have recently adopted this initiative launched originally by the University of Pristina. However, in general, it still does not amount to a sustainable approach for CPD.

4.3.1 Organizational Aspects

Although HEIs in Kosovo are responsible for covering expenses related to professional development for their staff, the KAA external reports continuously highlight lack of staff development planning and budgeting. Although formal regulation exists, there is no evidence of sustainable CPD in higher education institutions.

4.3.2 Incentives for Participation in Continuing Professional Development Activities

The MESTI regularly approves funds for research work and science development, for which academic staff may apply. These funds however are not spent and distributed properly. Similarly, a special fund is available for young researchers who recently joined the academic community (PhD students, assistants and assistant professors). This fund aims to stimulate young researchers/scholars to achieve the research and scientific maturity. However, there is no incentive at the level of HEI to join research groups, projects and industry cooperation, as staff is mainly expected to deliver teaching duties.

The institutional support varies depending on the policies and regulations of HEIs. Most of the HEIs approve unpaid leave, if staff applies for fellowships, staff development visits or a final thesis write-up period. The agency responsible for accrediting HEIs in Kosovo, Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) after its membership of ENQA was revoked as a result of KAA not being compliant with ESG standards, has returned to ENQA as an affiliate member.

The Draft Higher Education Law, which was withdrawn from Parliamentary procedures in March 2017, needs considerable improvement to ensure equal standards for all HEIs, clearly designed criteria for the institutions, clear academic award title procedures and clear criteria for appointment of members at university boards and at NQC to ensure progress in higher education. Since then, there have been numerous attempts to draft the new Law on Higher Education, and currently, after being drafted by MESTI, the law is in public consultation phase at MESTI.

5. MANAGEMENT AND OTHER EDUCATION STAFF FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

5.1. Requirements for Appointment

The highest normative act for all public universities is the Statute of the relevant University. Statutes must be in compliance with the Law on Higher Education of the Republic of Kosovo. All decisions taken by representatives of public universities must be in full compliance with the Statute. This document regulates the organization, functions and responsibilities of governing and management bodies, procedures, academic affairs, the student's status, student rights, obligations, and organization, academic staff recruitment, etc.

The University Steering Council, the Senate and the Rector are the main governing bodies of public universities pursuant to the Law on Higher Education (Law 2011/L-037). The University Steering Council is the principal governing authority in all public providers of higher education. The Steering Council has general strategic responsibilities for the effective functioning of the University. The Steering Council is responsible for all decisions regarding financial issues (budget, staff, infrastructure), in order to ensure appropriate conditions for the sustainable operation of the University in accordance with its obligations. The Steering Council reports and is responsible to the Ministry of Finance, for the proper and effective use of funds that the Ministry of Finance or any other public source has allocated to the University. The principal management authority of a public university is the Rector. The Rector of a public university is appointed by the Steering Council with an absolute majority of all eligible votes after a formal public announcement, after a professional assessment by a professional commission (panel) and after a hearing (with questions and answers) by the whole Steering Council of the University.

The Rector is responsible to the Steering Council for the effective, efficient and economic operation of the University. The Rector is assisted by Vice-Rectors and a Secretary General.

The number of members of the University Steering Council varies. However, each University can have no fewer than five (5) and no more than nine (9) members. A number of members of the Steering Council are appointed by the Ministry in general interest, and not to exceed one half of the total membership. Other members of the Steering Council are elected by the Senate among the academic staff of the University excluding people holding the following positions:

- Rector, Vice-Rector, Dean, Vice-Dean;
- Members of the Senate;
- The Secretary-General,
- Secretaries of the faculties.

The Secretary General is the highest executive administrative officer of the University, responsible to the Rector for the efficient, economic and effective administration at all levels of the University. He is the head of the office of the central administration of the University.

The Senate of the University is the highest academic body of the University, consisting of the following voting members:

- Rector;
- Vice-Rectors;
- Deans of all academic units;
- One member elected by and from amongst the academic staff in each academic unit;
- One or more members elected by the Student Parliament from among the full-time students of the University;
- One or two members elected by and from the non-academic staff of the University.

The Senate's areas of responsibility.

1. Depending on the general responsibilities of the Council and on the responsibilities of the Rector and Vice-Rectors, the Senate is responsible for:
 - 1.1. General strategic matters that relate to the research, studies, teaching and courses in the University, including:
 - 1.2. Criteria for admission of students;
 - 1.3. Selection (and promotion) of teaching staff (academic staff);
 - 1.4. Policies and procedures for evaluating and organizing exams for assessing the academic work of the students,
 - 1.5. Content of curricula;
 - 1.6. Provision of lifelong learning;
 - 1.7. Academic standards as well as course validation and review;
 - 1.8. Quality assurance and assessment;
 - 1.9. Procedures for awarding academic qualifications and honorary titles;
 - 1.10. Procedures for disciplinary exclusion of students due to academic or other reasons.
2. Developing strategies for academic activities in the University and about the necessary means for their support as well as provision of advice for the rector and the Council.
3. Developing policies for the protection of intellectual property of University and its commercial usage.

4. Provision of advice on matters that the Council or Rector request from the Senate According to the statutes of each institution, additional bodies may be established to support and advise the existing councils and the Rector.

At the academic unit level, the Dean, Vice-Deans, are the managers while the scientific council, the academic council and different committees are contributing to the functioning of the unit.

The University of Mitrovica where the language of instruction is Serbian is managed by the Rector, vice-Rectors, a Secretary General and a Student vice-Rector. The main decision body is the University Council that is composed of representatives of the local government, representatives from the faculties of the University, and representatives from the student population. The main areas of responsibility of this body is to: appoint the Rector, review and adopt the financial plan, etc. The operational management body of the University is the Senate. It is composed of: Rector, vice-Rectors, by two representatives of each Faculty (dean of Faculty and one full professor) and by one student from the faculties. The chairman of the Senate is the Rector. The main competences of this body are: to propose the candidate for the position of the Rector e to the Council, to propose the scholarship amount, to decide on education and scientific matters, to decide on rank/title of professors (Assistant, Associate, and Full), to decide on PhD candidates and topics for PhD dissertations, to decide on reports of commissions for evaluation of PhD dissertations. Before the topics related to professors' ranks and PhD dissertations come to the agenda of the Senate, they are firstly proceeded by the 'Expert councils', composed of highly ranked University professors from the scientific areas the relevant topic, who make proposals to the Senate. There is also the University Ethics Council that decides on ethical topics and issues at hand.

Private Higher Education institutions have their own governing bodies, too, but the detailed information concerning the members of these governing bodies, as well as how these Colleges are managed at the decision making and operational levels, are in sufficient on their web pages. However, most of the private Higher Education institutions declare that they are governed by:

- The Board/ Steering Council,
- The Rector/President
- The Academic Council,

Gender equality in University Management, Steering Council and the Senate remain a concerning issue at all seven public higher education institutions. However, University of Prishtina has been headed by an acting rector during the last

transitional period proving its dedication to gender equality and at the same time show-casing the first example of a woman rector.

Among all these public Higher Education institutions, the University of Prishtina, the University of Mitrovica “Isa Boletini”, the University of Peja “Haxhi Zeka” and the University of Prizren “Ukshin Hoti” stands out as institutions with two out of three/five Vice-Rectors being female. Among all the Private Higher Education institutions “Dardania College” have a female Rector, whereas the IBC-M has a female director.

5.2. Conditions of Service

The Rector of the public higher education institution is selected through a public competition process, which is transparent. All interested candidates are eligible to apply.

The Rector is elected by the Steering Council, by a majority vote of the total number of members of the Steering Council.

At the public higher education institutions, a candidate running for rectorship has to have the following qualifications:

- Proven academic teaching and scientific experience, equal to a full professor but with no requirement of holding the position of a full professor;
- Proven managerial skills.

Following the selection of the Rector, he/she submits proposals (a list of nominees) to the Steering Council from among the professors of the University for Vice-Rectors after having consulted with the Senate. The Vice-Rectors are elected by the Steering Council, by a majority vote of the total number of members of the Steering Council. The mandate of the Vice-Rectors shall be linked with that of the Rector, with a possible single renewal.

The Rector proposes the candidates for the position of General Secretary as well. The Secretary General of the University has to meet the following requirements:

- Academic degree (Master or equivalent, with a minimum of four years of study) preferably in the fields of law, economics or social sciences;
- Appropriate qualifications and experience;
- Proven organizational and managerial skills;
- Sufficient knowledge about educational, artistic and research processes;
- Minimum of five years of relevant working experience.

A person may not be selected for any of the managing positions if they are convicted of a criminal offense, plagiarism of higher education documents, discrimination, and bribery, or have broken the rules of the professional code of ethics. They are also dismissed if anything mentioned above occurs during their mandate, or if they fail to perform duties required by their position.

The modality and selection procedures of the managing bodies at the private higher education institutions are defined internally by each institution.

6. QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

6.1 Responsible Bodies

In the Republic of Kosovo, the quality assurance framework in higher education follows the principles applied in the European Higher Education Area by applying standards which are consistent with ESG 2015. The process of accreditation is applied in Kosovo which implies a formal recognition that the HEIs and their study programs meet the internationally accepted standards of quality and that their qualifications give the students a number of rights such as access to further education. The accreditation process is a mandatory process for all higher education institutions. Therefore, any degree is subject to an external review and accreditation decision. Students shall enrol only in accredited study programs in order for their diplomas to be recognized both in Kosovo and abroad.

The main mechanism for quality assurance in Kosovo is the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) which is recognized by the Law on Higher Education. The KAA activity and decisions shall be independent and are not subject to any review by either the Ministry or the Government. Competencies and responsibilities of the KAA are laid down in the Law on Higher Education No. 04/L-037, article 7, which stipulates that the KAA is an independent agency responsible for assessing and promoting the quality of higher education in Kosovo. According to this Law, the KAA is responsible for a number of activities, including evaluation, accreditation, monitoring and periodic control of institutions of higher education and their study programs in the territory of the Republic of Kosovo.

The mission of the KAA is to support the development of the quality in HE institutions through the accreditation process as well as to assure the Kosovo society that the quality of teaching and learning is at the level of international standards. The KAA aims are :

- To open the sector of higher education for providers from Kosovo and abroad;
- To provide quality assurance for all institutions of higher education;
- To promote, improve and develop the quality of the higher education sector;
- To create transparency and comparability in the interest of providers, students and the labour market;
- To encourage innovative forms and content in higher education;
- To ensure the comparability of degrees from Kosovo higher education institutions with those awarded by international programmes;
- To implement the objectives for the integration of Kosovo into the European Higher Education Area, and to contribute to its development.

The KAA consists of the State Council of Quality (SCQ) which is the policy making and governing body of the KAA. The SCQ comprises 9 members, of whom three are internationals, who are nominated by the Minister of Education and shall be approved by the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo. In 2018 the Ministry of Education approved a special Administrative Instruction No. 06/2018 on the Criteria and Procedures for the election of the members of the State Council of Quality (SCQ) which governs the nomination and selection procedure. The SCQ is chaired by the President and a Vice-President who are elected among the SCQ members. The SCQ reports annually to the Ministry and the Assembly of Kosovo concerning KAA's accreditation activities and on the adequacy of the infrastructural support available to it.

The KAA also consists of its permanent administrative structure, the Secretariat, which is responsible for the daily operations and management of the KAA. The Secretariat is managed by its Director who is elected according to the provisions of the Law on Civil Servants of the Republic of Kosovo and is not subject to the Parliament's approval.

Besides the provisions of the Law on Higher Education, two other main documents which regulate the operations and activities of the KAA are: the Administrative Instruction(AI) on Accreditation and the KAA Manual. The AI defines the detailed responsibilities of the KAA in relation to the external evaluation of HEIs while the KAA Manual consists of the standards of accreditation to be assessed during the external review of HEIs. The Law on Higher Education also recognises international accreditation of agencies, which are full members of the ENQA or the CHEA. According to article 3, paragraph 1.16, any accreditation body which, in the European Area of Higher Education, is in current membership of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) or (in the United States) is an accreditation body which has been recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or by the United States Department of Education (USDE) or from both or (in

any other jurisdiction) shall be considered a recognised accreditation body. To date, the KAA has formally recognised several international accreditations in local institutions in Kosovo, such as the RIT, the IBCM, the Faculty of Economics of University of Ljubljana (not operational) and other study programs provided by local institutions.

Other relevant bodies which support and supervise the KAA's external quality assurance processes in higher education are firstly the Ministry of Education (MESTI), the main body responsible for the planning and oversight of the higher education system in Kosovo, which regulates the system through the issuance of documents, policies and other by-laws. Secondly, the Parliamentary Commission on Education, Science, Technology, Culture, Youth and Sports reviews all issues related to all levels of education, including the quality assurance in higher education. The Commission issues recommendations on the improvement of the quality of education and also requests regular reports and meetings with the members of SCQ depending on the issues at hand. Thirdly, the Government of the Republic of Kosovo does not have direct competencies in the quality assurance system in Kosovo's higher education, but it decides on all issues which are related to policies, strategies and other documents which regulate the field of higher education.

According to the principles of ESG, higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance. In Kosovo, all institutions of higher education have established systems of internal quality assurance which support the development of quality through Quality Assurance Offices, Quality Assurance Regulations and Guidelines. However, their systems are not yet very functional and consolidated. HEIs mainly undergo internal self-assessment procedures when subject to accreditation process rather than having these processes as normal and regular processes foreseen under an action plan.

The HEIs of University of Mitrovica and three professional higher education institutions where the language of instruction is Serbian: the Higher Technical Professional School, Zvečan/Zvečan, the Higher Economic Professional School, Leposaviq/Leposavić and the Higher Technical Professional School, Ferizaj/Uroševac – Leposaviq/Leposavić, obtain accreditation that must be renewed in the period of 7 years from the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Republic of Serbia (<http://www.kapk.org/en/home/>). There are two types of accreditation: the accreditation of the HEI as an institution, and the accreditation of the study programmes of HEIs. In order to obtain accreditation for the institutions, HEIs must fulfil all strict conditions related to: ratio of employed and contracted teachers, workload of teachers, teachers' scientific research work (impact factor of the

teachers) and qualifications for courses they teach, institution's teaching space, laboratories, etc. The accreditation of the study programme considers also the number of mandatory and elective courses, the quality of topics per course, the courses' goals, outcomes, modes of conducting exams, etc.

In terms of internationalization, the KAA became a full member of ENQA in 2014 and a full member of EQAR in 2015. However, following the Kosovo Government's decision in 2017 to dismiss the entire management of the KAA, ENQA and EQAR initiated an early evaluation process for the KAA. Upon this evaluation, the EQAR Registry concluded that the agency is no longer able to "act autonomously" and is no longer in a position to assume "full responsibility for its operations" as required by ESG standard 3.3, and announced its decision to exclude the KAA from their registry in February 2018. ENQA also initiated an early evaluation procedure which included an external assessment of the KAA with an Expert Panel who concluded that the KAA was only partially in compliance with ESG 2015. Following the expert panel's report, on 19th September 2019, the ENQA Board concluded that the overall level of compliance with the ESG is not sufficient to renew the KAA membership and therefore voted to exclude KAA from its membership. According to the ENQA Board's decision, if the KAA wishes to reapply for membership in the future, it is advised to do that in two years' time from the days of the exclusion decision.

6.2 Approaches and Methods for Quality Assurance

The KAA's primary activities concern:

- The accreditation of public and private institutions of higher education;
- The accreditation of new institutions of higher education and their programs (preliminary accreditation);
- The accreditation of new programs at those institutions of higher education that are already accredited.

Besides the Administrative Instruction on Accreditation, which sets out the main procedures applied in an external review procedure, the Accreditation Manual stipulates the standards which should be met by the HEIs in order to gain accreditation. According to the Manual, the KAA decisions for reaccreditation of study programs are made and apply separately for each geographical location (campuses/branches), form of delivery (full time/part time) and teaching language. These are considered distinct processes and are subject to separate submissions for accreditation to the KAA and each of them is expected to individually meet the minimum level of quality standards set out in the present manual.

All the external quality assurance activities are carried out through an external review procedure which includes 4 steps: a self-assessment report by the HEIs, a site visit by the international team of experts, the decision by the SCQ and follow-up procedures of the KAA. Accreditation is a cyclic process which implies that every HEI should seek accreditation every three to five years, depending on the decision issued by the SCQ. According to article 15, paragraph 2, of the LHE, a provider of higher education seeking accreditation for the first time submits a request to the KAA at least a year before the expected date to obtain accreditation. Also, paragraph 3, stipulates that the reaccreditation of providers shall be carried out by the KAA at intervals of not more than five (5) years and that re-accreditation is not done without a review of the provider's self-evaluation report, but in exceptional circumstances.

The Accreditation Manual contains the Standards and Performance Indicators. Standards for the institutional evaluation consist of the following general areas:

- 1) Public mission and institutional objectives;
- 2) Strategic planning, governance and administration;
- 3) Financial planning and management;
- 4) Academic Integrity, responsibility and public accountability;
- 5) Quality Management;
- 6) Learning and Teaching;
- 7) Research;
- 8) Staff, employment processes and professional development;
- 9) Student administration and support services;
- 10) Learning resources and facilities;
- 11) Institutional cooperation.

Meanwhile, the general areas for the program evaluation include the following:

- 1) Mission, objectives and administration;
- 2) Quality Management;
- 3) Academic Staff;
- 4) Educational process content;
- 5) Students;
- 6) Research;
- 7) Infrastructure and recourses.

For a positive accreditation, only the achievement of standards, considered as the minimum mandatory level to be achieved by all education providers, is taken into consideration. Performance indicators are offered as examples of good practice aimed at stimulating and motivating continuous quality enhancement across the

higher education sector. Performance indicators are considered optional, though meeting them impacts the KAA decision on the duration of the accreditation period.

The assessment of higher education institutions and/or study programs is judged based on a four-level compliance scale, as follows:

- Fully compliant;
- Substantially compliant;
- Partially compliant;
- Non-compliant.

In pursuit of a positive decision for the program and institutional reaccreditation, every 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 delaying, withdrawing, suspending or denying accreditation.

While the KAA has established clear criteria, standards and procedures for the accreditation process, it has yet to implement a monitoring process. The KAA applies follow-up procedures, which require HEIs to submit Improvement Plans on how they are addressing the conditions and recommendations provided by the expert teams during the accreditation procedures. However, due to lack of human resources the follow-up procedures have been side lined by the accreditation process, which is the main process of KAA's operations.

7. EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

7.1 Support measures for Learners in Higher Education

No information available.

7.2 Definition of the Target Group (s)

No information available.

7.3 Specific Support Measures

No information available.

7.4 Guidance and Counselling in Higher Education

7.4.1 Academic Guidance

According to the present Accreditation Manual, Academic counselling, career planning and employment advice as well as personal or psychological counselling services should be made available with easy access for students from any part of the institution. The majority of HEIs in Kosovo do offer academic guidance to their students through academic offices or students offices, even though they have a big number of students. Academic guidance is also offered by professors individually. Usually, all academic staff is required to have in-person consultation with students prior to and after the assessment periods, consultation when drafting the BA or MA thesis, and other activities. The academic staff is usually available for online consultations with students through electronic platforms of each HEIs.

7.4.2 Psychological Counselling

Psychological counselling has not been part of the operations of HEIs in Kosovo. This was not demanded by either the MESTI or the KAA. However, in late 2018 the KAA revised its Accreditation Manual, and among many standards now it requires from HEIs to provide personal or psychological counselling services to students. To date, there is no information that any HEI has managed to establish this kind of services to their students.

7.4.3 Career Guidance

There is no genuine tracking system in Kosovo of graduates and generally the communication with them is not maintained after their graduation. Career offices are not established in all HEIs in Kosovo, and thus also currently enrolled students lack professional and ongoing information about employment possibilities, or training on how pursue an employment opportunity. Alumni organisations are established at only a handful of HEIs and mostly are not very operational.

The KAA has strengthened its accreditation criteria recently, and, under the new Accreditation Manual, it requires that regular contact is maintained with alumni, keeping them informed about institutional developments, inviting their participation in activities, and encouraging their support for new developments. However, as stated above, these offices need to be established in all HEIs and strengthen them with human resources and professional training. At public universities, to date only the University of Prishtina and the University of Peja have operational career development offices. These institutions do organize employment fairs and other

activities with future employers and the industry which aim at increasing opportunities for students to find employment upon their graduation.

8. MOBILITY AND INTERNATIONALIZATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Mobility and internationalization of the higher education have assumed an increasing importance in Kosovo during the last years. The Kosovo Education Strategy 2022 – 2026 underlines under the Strategic Objective 4 that “higher education reform is intended to be achieved through advancing the legal framework, developing the capacity of quality assurance mechanisms, increasing participation in international programs, and improving the academic and research infrastructure.” Higher education institutions have recognized the added value of mobility and internationalization in relation to different aspects of their functioning: curricula development, capacity building, quality assurance, networking, etc. Therefore, the efforts of the higher education institutions have increased the number of partnerships, mobility of the student, academic and administrative staff as well as participation in different projects.

From 2015-2022, there were 7685 total number of mobilities of students and academic/administrative staff out of which 2673 incoming and 5012 out-going through the international credit mobility action of the Erasmus+ programme. Until 2022, higher education institutions in Kosovo gained 50 Capacity Building projects in the field of Higher Education, 9 in CBVET, 8 projects in CBY, and 4 in CBS. From 2021-2022, there was 1 Erasmus Mundus Design Measures project. From 2015-2022 in total 41 Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Scholarships were granted to students from Kosovo. In very tough competition, higher education institutions in Kosovo gained 4 Jean Monnet projects until 2022.

Structurally and in terms of the day-to-day management of the mobility and internationalization, HEIs have either international relations offices (IRO), departments of international cooperation or divisions as part of the department of international cooperation. The highest official for mobility and internationalization is the vice rector for international affairs. All higher education institutions in Kosovo have such a position in their organogram. However, in most of them the title of the respective vice rector includes also sometimes “quality assurance”, or “research activities”, which is true for some of the departments of international affairs as well.

In terms of the capacities, most of the relevant international affairs units in higher education institutions in Kosovo are understaffed, except for the University of

Prishtina, which has a well-established International Relations Office (IRO). Taking into consideration the efforts of higher education institutions in Kosovo to increase the mobility and internationalization component, and recognizing the need for taking concrete steps in this regard, the European Commission is funding the QUADIC Project (609786-EPP-1-2019-1-XK-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP) in which, out of 18 partners, 9 higher education institutions of Kosovo are equal partners of the consortium. This project has enabled the participatory institutions to establish their IROs as well as build institutional internationalization capacities or improve the performance of existing IROs. The project also aims to increase the capacities for project writing and management.

The higher education institutions have participated in different networks and programs, especially after 1999. In this regard the participation in Tempus, Erasmus+, Erasmus Mundus, including SIGMA, Mevlana, CEEPUS, Exchange Program, FP7, Horizon 2020 COST Actions, HERAS+, RCC, etc. All institutions from Kosovo where the instruction\language is Serbian (University of North Mitrovica, Higher Technical Professional School, Zvecan, Higher Economic Professional School, Leposavic and Higher Technical Professional School, Urosevac - Leposavic), have made the internationalisation strategies with the general objectives to engage their own capacities in the promotion and stimulation of all forms of international cooperation, including the international partnerships.

The partnerships will include cooperation in the following fields: 1) research and teaching, 2) mobility of students, teaching and administrative staff, 3) transfer of knowledge and the social responsibility, 4) provision of support for the improvement of language skills, 5) enhancing teaching through the establishment of joint study programs with foreign universities, 6) participation in projects of the European Union, as well as of individual countries, international organisations and associations outside the European Union.

Majority of the Kosovo Higher Education Institutions are members of the European Union Association (EUA). Some of them have also signed the Magna Charta Universitatum, acknowledging its commitment and dedication to the fundamental principles enshrined in Magna Charta, as well as further promotion and development.

Since 2015 the University of North Mitrovica has coordinated (c) and has participated as a partner (p) in the following Erasmus+ KA2 projects:

- DBBT - 2015 (c), KLABS - 2015 (c), LNSS - 2015 (p), NatRisk - 2016 (p), ELEMEND - 2017 (p), TRAFSAF - 2018 (c), SWARM - 2018 (p), SMARTEL - 2020 (c), KALCEA - 2020 (p), PELMOB - 2022, DGTRANS - 2022, AL4LIFE -

2022 (p) (<https://en.pr.ac.rs/international/international-programmes/erasmus/>)

- University of North Mitrovica also participates in CEEPUS projects: RS-0304-14-2122, SK-0405-13-2122, HR-1302-05-2223, PL-1705-01-2223, RS-0304-15-2223 and SK-0405-14-2223 (<https://en.pr.ac.rs/international/international-programmes/ceepus/>)

The University of North Mitrovica also organizes international scientific conferences in the faculties of Economy and Law and there is also an international scientific conference "MIT" (<http://www.mit.rs/>) where the Faculty of Natural sciences and Mathematics is co-organiser.

8.1 Student Mobility

The mobility of students has increased rapidly over the last seven years especially thanks to the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (ICM) projects. In general during the period 2015 – 2020 5954 student and academic mobility has taken place under the ICM component of the Erasmus+ programme, while 28 students from Kosovo have been selected to attend the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (EMJMD) (<http://erasmuspluskosovo.org/sq/>). Kosovo also participates in the Western Balkans Alumni Association (WBAA) representing alumni participating as students or scholars in EU Programme countries.

A gap is observed when comparing student mobility to EU and from EU. Generally, the main reasons are probably connected with the use of English language in higher education institutions. One of those reasons might have to do with a relatively small number of courses offered in English across Bachelor and Master curricula of the study programs as well as whole programs taught in English language. Another reason might be the inadequate level of English for teaching of a percentage of the academic staff. It is highly recommended that Higher education institutions increase the number of the programs and courses offered in English.

There are also other mobility/scholarships granted by different countries, and donors, which the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MESTI) has memoranda of understanding with. The existing agreements which MESTI has, including the new agreements realized during 2022, are as follows:

- Associated status in the Horizon Europe program, this is more a research-oriented program, but which has a direct impact on the performance of the institutions;

- Erasmus+ program - previous schemes, including the opportunity given for VET sector in the new program 2021-2027;
- MoU with the United States Embassy for the Fulbright program, for a period of 5 years;
- Agreement with the French Embassy for Scholarships, the new agreement is in the process of ratifying. It provides scholarships for Kosovar students for MA level;
- Scholarships for studying in Hungary (BA, MA and PhD) – 75 scholarships are being provided annually (50 undergraduate and graduate studies, 10 OTM and 10 PhD).

In addition to information about cooperation with partners, I am also conveying information about scholarship schemes offered by MESTI (state budget) for Kosovo students.

Scholarships for studies within the country:

- Scholarships for vulnerable social groups (Students with special needs, underrepresented communities) - social dimension;
- Scholarships for outstanding students;
- Scholarships for STEM fields - specifically this scheme promotes women in STEM.

Scholarships for studies abroad:

- Bachelor's and Master's scholarships for studies abroad in the top 100 Universities according to the Times Higher Education Ranking
- Scholarships for doctorates in the top 500 Universities according to the Times Higher Education Ranking

There is also a Memorandum of Cooperation signed between MESTI and the Counsel for Higher Education of Turkey, which foresees various scholarships for students from Kosovo to study in Turkey.

8.2 Academic Staff Mobility

The higher education institutions in Kosovo have benefited from participating in international programs and networks (see 8). The mobility of the academic staff has continuously increased over time. Those mobilities have had a great impact on several areas, including quality assurance, curricula development, project proposals writing and project management, advancing doctoral studies, capacity building projects. The number of mobility has especially increased during the last years within the framework of Erasmus+ programme.

Academic staff show an increased interest in mobility, especially the young academics. Since 2020, a total of 2975 academic staff and students have benefitted from the opportunity to go to EU through ICM component of Erasmus+ program, while in total, since 2015, 3880 of them have participated in the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (ICM) program.

8.3 Other Dimensions of Internationalization in Higher Education

8.3.1 European, Global and Intercultural Dimension in Curriculum Development

Modernizing the curricula has been the focus of many efforts and projects after 1999. While higher education institutions still value the importance of improving the curricula, it seems that after the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) became fully functional it is the accreditation process that has driven curricula development, and improvement in the area. Since the accreditation process is conducted through engaging higher education experts from all around Europe for different study programs and higher education institutions, the latter focus their efforts in improving the curricula by fulfilling the recommendations the external experts give. While the accreditation process has been continuously refined, and the accreditation requirements have been higher year-by-year, the higher education institutions have responded more efficiently to requirements making consistent efforts in improving the curricula. However, the more evident internationalization component of higher education institutions in Kosovo contributes constantly to the curriculum improvement and development agenda, especially when the aim of the internationalization is or becomes applying for joint degrees.

8.3.2 Partnerships and Networks

HEIs in Kosovo are looking for long term partnerships as well as becoming part of different networks where the mission is the reforming and the development of higher

education. There are different ideas and initiatives of partners in ICM of Erasmus+ programme to continue with their cooperation and work together in applying for Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (KA1) or Capacity-Building projects in the field of higher education (KA 2).

As part of internationalization and aiming at contributing to the region of the Balkans, and South Eastern Europe, the HEIs of Kosovo are part of different forums, which are mainly rectors' forums. Observatory Magna Carta Universitatum, the European University Association, the Danube Rectors' Conference, the Rectors' Forum of Southeast Europe and Western Balkans, the Balkan University Association, etc. Discussions and decisions taken by universities' highest officials in these forums certainly facilitate the cooperation, when it comes to cooperation of individual or groups of researchers, which also results in the universities sharing information, knowing each other better as well as committing themselves to internationalization and mobility.

8.4 Bilateral Agreements

8.4.1 Bilateral Agreements

HEIs of Kosovo traditionally have numerous and various bilateral agreements with regional and European university partners. For example, the University of Prishtina has almost 400 such bilateral agreements with HEIs and institutes in Europe and the USA. Although not to this extent, the same can be stated for other public universities and private colleges. However, bilateral agreements are nowadays mainly and the first step towards creating a network of cooperation and joining efforts for application to state, European, or other funds.

8.4.2 Cooperation and Participation in Worldwide Programs and Organizations

Besides EU Programmes such as Erasmus+, IPA and other projects from EU, HEIs in Kosovo have a very good tradition of cooperating with different international organizations, such as The World Bank, IMF, EBRD, UNICEF, Save the Children, US Embassy, USAID, DAAD, GIZ, ADA, the Swiss Cooperation Office, WUS-Austria, The British Council, etc. This cooperation is done through institutional agreements, or through academic staff and students engaging in different projects of the respective organizations. As a result of these collaborations, higher education institutions, have soundly contributed to the success of numerous projects of the above-mentioned organizations. This success has helped the society in general, as well as the students and academic staff to diversify and enrich their professional experiences.

9. ONGOING REFORMS AND POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

9.1 Overall National Education Strategy and Key Objectives

The educational system in Kosovo has been strategically planned for many years, based on strategic documents approved by MESTI. These strategies have always been in line with overall national strategies approved by the Government of the Republic of Kosovo. Currently, the strategic documents of MESTI for the development of education are based on the Kosovo Education Strategy 2022 – 2026, which is an umbrella strategic document for all areas in Kosovo. This strategy aims at addressing key obstacles to development of Kosovo educational system and also aims at coordinating the development policies and institutional processes.

The Kosovo Education Strategy falls within the category of Human Capital, and there are seven KES interventions, which include all levels of education in Kosovo. Higher education is specifically addressed in several measures of activities, which include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Increase of the quality of higher education through the review of study programs, the advancement of academic infrastructure, the promotion of excellence in teaching and research, and the implementation of high standards of institutional evaluation and study programs.
- Improvement of the governance and funding of higher education through review of legislation, development of advanced information management system, increase of professional capacities, improvement of services for students and ensuring academic integrity, transparency and accountability in higher education.
- Better connection of higher education with the labour market through harmonization of study programs, increase of opportunities for practical work of students, cooperation with enterprises and increase of interdisciplinary programs and STEM programs.
- Internationalization of higher education through joint study programs, increase of participation in international programs of academic and scientific cooperation, as well as integration in the European Higher Education Area.

The vision of Kosovo Education Strategy is:

Quality and inclusive education, which develops the potential and competencies of individuals, as well as encourages lifelong learning, in line with global transformation trends.

Whereas the mission is:

“Development of an Education System based on quality, all-inclusiveness and accountability, offering education and training of individuals in accordance with the best international standards and practices”.

The strategic document covers all levels of education, includes 5 areas and has the following strategic objectives:

Topic	Strategic Objective
Early childhood education:	Increase inclusion and equal access to early childhood education.
Pre-university education:	Improve the quality of pre-university education through the consolidation of quality assurance mechanisms and the provision of quality teaching.
Vocational Education, Training and Adult Education:	Harmonize vocational education and training with dynamic developments in technology and the labour market, in function of lifelong learning.
Higher Education:	Improve the quality, integrity and competitiveness of higher education.
Digitalization of education:	Use digital technology to improve services and quality in education, in line with digital transformation trends.

At present, there is no separate strategic document for the higher education. Strategic development of higher education is solely provided for under the Strategic Objective 4 of the overall Kosovo Education Strategy.

The impact indicators of the higher education strategic objective are:

- Percentage of study programs implemented in accordance with quality standards.
- The degree of implementation of the financing methodology of HEIs based on performance.
- Availability of data for educational institutions and the general public.
- Degree of compliance of study programs that are in line with the demands of the labor market.
- Number of joint projects of HEIs with enterprises.
- Number of joint international projects for higher education and scientific research.

The outcome indicators under this strategic objective are the following:

- All study programs of HEIs are in line with quality standards.
- Infrastructure and technology for teaching and research in HEIs are advanced.
- Quality assurance mechanisms in higher education are fully functional in all HEIs.
- Mechanisms for professional development of the academic staff of HEIs are fully functional.
- The number of scientific publications in indexed international journals of the academic staff of HEIs increases by 10% every year.
- The ratio of academic staff - students in public HEIs is at least 1:30.
- KAA is a full member of ENQA and EQAR.
- Consolidated legal framework in higher education that guarantees the institutional and financial independence of the KAA, as well as institutional autonomy and academic independence of HEIs.
- Mechanisms for issues of ethics and academic integrity are fully functional in all HEIs.
- By 2023, the Higher Education Management Information System is fully operational.
- By 2023, the Register of Scientific Researchers is fully operational.
- By 2024, the implementation of the performance-based financing methodology of higher education institutions begins.
- The staff of DHE/MESTI and KAA grows and develops continuously through professional training.
- Various scholarship schemes are offered to students in higher education.
- Study programs are in line with labor market demands.
- Career development mechanisms are fully functional in all HEIs.

- Increased opportunities for internships for students.
- Joint projects of HEIs with enterprises are implemented.
- The number of students attending study programs in STEM fields increases.
- Increased participation of girls in STEM programs, through motivation with scholarships.
- HEIs offer joint study programs with international universities.
- Mechanisms for project development and coordination are fully functional in all HEIs.
- The mobility of academic staff and students in higher education increases.
- Participation in international programs for higher education and research increases.

Monitoring of the Kosovo Education Strategy will be done at two levels:

- Monitoring of activities by which it is determined whether the activities have been carried out at the right time and in the right quality, and
- Monitoring of objectives is based on their indicators.

The budget allocated for the implementation of the strategy for Higher Education is 54,678,312.00 Euro, or 17% of the overall strategy budget.

9.2 Overview of the Education Reform Process and Drivers

Historically, there have been many reforms undertaken in the educational system in Kosovo especially after the end of the war in 1999. The major reform undertaken in Kosovo's higher education system is undoubtedly the introduction of Bologna system. These kinds of reforms have been introduced and supported strongly by the international community through their donor projects and expertise. The support of international donors is still strongly present, and many activities have been changed/ revised as a consequence of their lobbying and impact.

Formally, the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) is in charge of planning and development of higher education. According to the Law on Higher Education No. 04/L-037, article 6, the Ministry is responsible, among others, for:

- planning the development of higher education in Kosovo in consultation with the accredited providers of higher education;
- regulating public and private providers of higher education and approving their Statutes.

- allocating funds to higher education providers for purposes of teaching and research in the public interest, etc.

However, in addition to MESTI, the Assembly of Kosovo has several competencies such as approval of statutes of public universities in Kosovo, approval of the applicants for Universities, etc. Moreover, the Parliamentary Commission on Education has the right to seek full reports on the operations of the Ministry, the KAA, universities, and of other public stakeholders dealing with education in Kosovo. According to the Law, the members of the State Council of Quality (SCQ), as the decision-making body of the KAA, shall be approved by the Assembly. As such, the KAA and the SCQ shall report about its operations on accreditation at least once per year to the Parliament.

The Government of Kosovo has naturally an important role in planning and deciding strategically about the development of education in Kosovo. Strategic documents of MESTI shall all be approved by the Government and need to be referenced to the main National Development Strategy which is drafted and approved by the lead of the Prime Minister's Office.

Civil society is becoming increasingly important in the policy making and strategic decision of the Ministry of Education. The majority of processes that include drafting or revision of policies and documents involve the participation of civil society representatives. It is worth noting that the KAA has signed a cooperation agreement with the coalition of NGOs dealing with education and they are allowed to observe the meetings of the SCQ of KAA on a regular basis.

An important element which needs to be strengthened and which is currently lacking in Kosovo is the involvement of students in policy making and strategic development. A National Students Union has been established under the supervision of MESTI and funded by a Tempus project. The Union is functional. However, the presence of student representatives at all levels of education decision-making should be increased in order to meet European standards. Quality assurance, which lies at the heart of the Bologna system, seeks to involve as much as possible students and consider them as constructive partners in the planning and delivery of higher education. In this regard, Kosovo lags behind all European countries.

9.3 National Reforms in Higher Education

The Education Strategy (ES), which is the main document for the development of the education sector in Kosovo for the period 2022-2026, is based on the plan of the

Government of Kosovo 2021-2025, and the situation analysis of priority areas of the education sector.

Other activities deserving to report, but do not amount to reforms, are the following:

- There have been several attempts by the Ministry, through its donors, to draft policies on profiling the public universities established in the last decade in Kosovo.
- There is a general, yet unofficial, agreement among all stakeholders in Kosovo that public universities in Kosovo should provide only profiled study programs based on their characteristics of the region and the profile of their academic staff.

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