



THE MANUAL FOR EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS



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FOREWORD

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) has assessed Kosovo Accreditation Agency, which is the main formal authority for quality assurance of Higher Education Institutions in Kosovo, as an exemplary institution, which has reached significant progress on fitting the Higher Education of the country into the European frameworks.

Since then, the KAA is proud to have been adhered to the strict procedure of internal and external quality assurance, based on the Bologna action lines and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), which is adopted by the Ministers responsible for HE in the European Higher Education Area, in May 2015.

To date, Kosovo and the KAA have marked significant progress in quality assurance by adopting the National Qualification Framework, Criteria and Standards for Accreditation of HEIs, recognition, and promotion of the learning outcomes and shifting of the paradigm of learning and teaching process towards student-centred instead of teacher/professor-centred.

Moreover, the international partners consider the work of the KAA as an example of good practice in the field of Higher Education in Kosovo, and this is not a privilege but a commitment to further development and results.

In this spirit, among many legal and administrative procedures, standards, and manuals, the KAA has developed this handbook to provide practical guidance to the external evaluation Team members assigned to evaluate HEIs on behalf of the Agency.

The KAA believes that providing clear guides and sharing of experience benefits the actions for improvement of the HEIs' external evaluation process, improvement of all the institutional stakeholders involved in the process, and advancement of the Quality Assurance system in adherence with the European standards.

The Kosovo Accreditation Agency

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PART I: INTRODUCTION

1. Background

This handbook is developed to provide practice-based guidelines to the international evaluation experts assigned to conduct an external evaluation of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Kosovo on behalf of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA).

The external evaluation of HEIs in Kosovo is regulated by a number of legal acts, which are the reference point of the evaluation programme and are publicly available on the official website of the KAA¹. The main legal acts currently into force are:

- the Law No. 04/L-037 on Higher Education in the Republic of Kosovo²,
- the Administrative Instruction (AI) No. 15/2018 for accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Kosovo³,
- the Law no. 05/L-031 on General Administrative Procedure⁴, and
- the KAA's Accreditation Manual⁵.

According to the legislation, into force, the international external evaluators should perform the external evaluation process of HEIs in Kosovo, based on the Self-Evaluation Reports prepared and submitted by HEIs in accordance with the KAA Standards Manual, information and impressions the evaluators record during the site visit, and evaluation of the progress HEIs have made since the previous external evaluation.

The External Evaluation Team is expected to qualitatively and quantitatively evaluate the HEIs' quality assurance systems related to academic, research and development activities, management and administration. Meanwhile, the KAA expects the external evaluation of HEIs to be objective and the international evaluators to respect the academic ethics, to contribute to the continues improvement of the HEIs.

The KAA is responsible to inform the international external evaluators on the latest versions of the relevant documents to be used during the external evaluation process, such as: the KAA Standards Manual and accompanying annexes, templates for the Self-Evaluation Report, the External Review Reports for Institution and Study Programs evaluation, guidelines for the external evaluation process, and administrative procedures. Besides its practical nature to introduce the external evaluators with a set of guidelines for conducting the external evaluation of HEIs in Kosovo, this handbook aims to share some of the best practices and lessons learnt of the evaluators and other stakeholders into the process to inspire their deeper involvement to the local policy and context.

Moreover, the Kosovo Accreditation Agency, the Higher Education Institutions and other stakeholders interested in the process may use the document as a reference, as well.

2. Country Overview

The theory and practice widely accept that effective cooperation among stakeholders relies very much on the context of the country where they operate. Therefore, this part of the handbook presents an overview of Kosovo, which would help the international external evaluators understand the general context of the country and relate it to the guiding elements for carrying out the External Evaluation process.

1 www.akreditimi-ks.org

2 The Assembly of Kosovo, (2011). Law No. 04/L-037 on Higher Education in the Republic of Kosovo. Pristine. Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, [accessed on: www.akreditimi-ks.org].

3 Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. (2018). Administrative Instruction No. 15/2018 for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Kosovo. Pristine. MEST, [accessed on: www.akreditimi-ks.org].

4 The Assembly of Kosovo. (2016). Law No. 05/L-031 on General Administrative Procedure. Prishtina. Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo. No. 20. [accessed on: http://www.mei-ks.net/repository/docs/annex_9_law_on_general_administrative_procedure.pdf].

5 KAA. (2015). Accreditation Manual. Prishtina, [accessed on: www.akreditimi-ks.org].

Political

Kosovo is the newest country in Europe, established as an independent state on February 17, 2008 and has a Parliamentary character. After the independence, short-term governments have characterized its political context. The political instability and short-term governments continue to be a hinder to state development and international subjectivity. Kosovo has signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU in 2015⁶, and it is a potential EU membership candidate.

Economy

According to the World Bank (2020), "Kosovo economy grew consistently above the Western Balkan average in the post-global financial crisis period and tripled from 2000 to 2019 (from 1,088 USD in 2000 to 4,409 USD in 2019)". However, despite this tripling, the WB concludes, "Kosovo remains the third poorest country in Europe" in terms of GDP per capita. In addition, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has provisioned in its report "World Economic Outlook October 2020"⁷ that Kosovo's GDP for 2020 is expected to decrease by 7.5% due to the COVID-19 pandemic, while the economy is expected to recover in 2021 with up to 6% growth. This has been a hit for Kosovo's economy. According to the data published by the "Labour Force Survey Q3 2020"⁸ of the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (ASK), unemployment remains high, especially among women 33.1%, compared to males, 21.5% and the youth in the age group 15-24 years old with 46.9%. The Republic of Kosovo's economy heavily relies on remittances, consumption, and less on investments and export. The official currency used in Kosovo is EURO.

Geography

Kosovo (10,908 km²) is located in the middle of the Balkans Peninsula, South-East Europe, and borders Albania in the southwest, Montenegro in the northwest, North Macedonia in the south, and Serbia in the northeast. The climate in Kosovo is continental, with cold, dry winters and warm, humid summers. The terrain is mostly a flat basin with an elevation of 400-700 meters above sea level, surrounded by several high mountain ranges with elevations of 2,000 meters above sea level¹⁰. The most used means of transport in Kosovo is (own/taxi/rent-a-car) car driving, and each corner of the country, from east to west and south to north, can be reached within two hours of driving.

Demographics

According to the data provided by the 2011 census¹¹, Kosovo population amounts to 1,739,825, comprised of five ethnic groups: Albanians who constitute majority (1,616,869 or 92.9% of the total population); Bosnians (27,533 or 1.6%); Serbs (25,532 or 1.5%); Turks (18,738 or 1.1%), Ashkali (15,436 or 0.9%); Egyptians (11,524 or 0.7%), Roma (8,824 or 0.5%); Gorani (10,265 or 0.6%); and other groups who constitute 0.1% of the total population. According to the same source (Census 2011), more than 50% of Kosovo people are women, and Kosovo is considered to have the youngest population in Europe, on average aged 25 years old.

6 Council of the European Union. (2015). Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) between the European Union and Kosovo signed. Strasbourg. Press Release, [accessed on: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/10/27/kosovo-eu-stabilisation-association-agreement/>].

7 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kosovo/overview>.

8 IMF. (2020). World Economic Outlook October 2020. Washington DC, [accessed on: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2020/09/30/world-economic-outlook-october-2020>].

9 ASK. (2020). Labour Force Survey Q3 2020. Prishtina, [accessed on: <https://ask.rks-gov.net/en/kosovo-agency-of-statistics/add-news/labour-force-survey-q3-2020>].

10 The Independent Commission for Mines and Minerals. (2020). Geography. Government of the Republic of Kosovo. Prishtina, [accessed on: <https://www.kosovo-mining.org/kosovo/geography/?lang=en>]

11 <https://ask.rks-gov.net/en/kosovo-agency-of-statistics/add-news/demographic-data-by-municipalities-2011>

3. Methodology and structure

Supporting the KAA to implement the selected ENQA recommendations, the Higher Education Research and Applied Science Plus (HERAS+) project, in Kosovo, has supported development of the guidelines and this handbook for a practice-based introduction of the KAA international external evaluators to the HEIs' quality assurance process. HERAS+ project aims at "a more competitive and diversified public higher education and research sector in Kosovo in line with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), European Research Area (ERA) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 and 9 related to quality assurance, economy and labour market relevance, international cooperation and the Social Dimension of higher education".

The methodology used for development of this handbook is the mixed methodology of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis through a thematic deductive approach. The set methodology has enabled the KAA to conduct an in-depth review and analysis of the quality assurance principles' embedment in Kosovo's higher education system and their reflection on the development of the practice-based guidelines for international external evaluators engaged by the KAA. It provides an overview of the local context in terms of the country profile and the HE and QA systems with the aim of providing to the international external evaluators a wider overview of the country where the HEIs operate and their work will be performed. In addition, the methodology has enabled development of practice-based guidelines grouped in eight themes, which guide the international external evaluators through the HE and QA systems; the main stakeholders; the way how to effectively and objectively conduct the evaluation of HEIs in line with the accreditation standards and criteria; be in close contact with the KAA, be objective and respect academic ethics; complete preparations on time prior the site visit, establish effective communication with the HEI during the visit; prepare an objective External Review Report for re/accreditation of the education providers and evaluate meeting of the follow-up recommendations from previous evaluation reports.

This methodology has also enabled validation of the information collected and triangulated through three methods:

- deskwork - mapping of the existing documents and resources, which set the legislative background of the Higher Education quality assurance system in Kosovo, with the aim of developing guidelines for External Evaluation process of HEIs, in compliance with ENQA regulations;
- interviews, and
- focus group with the main stakeholders in the area of Higher Education system in Kosovo – assessing the way how the experience, good practices and lessons learnt during the external evaluation of HEIs in Kosovo provide inputs for development of practical guidelines based on perspectives of all the stakeholders in the process and the local context. The interviews and the focus group have been conducted with the main stakeholders of the HE quality assurance in Kosovo: Kosovo Accreditation Agency; State Council of Quality; International External Evaluators; Higher Education Institutions (public and private) and their students' organizations, ENQA.

While mapping and analysis of the existing legislation and other documents on the Quality Assurance of Higher Education system in Kosovo, is made through collection of secondary data or deskwork. The documents and resources used for deskwork are: the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, the Law on Higher Education, Administrative Instruction no. 15/2018, KAA Accreditation Manual, ESG 2015, National Qualification Framework 2020, ENQA – KAA External Review Report 2019, SCQ procedures of work, the Law on Administrative Procedures.

Moreover, this methodology has enabled collection and analysis of the experiences and perspectives of the main stakeholders of the HE quality assurance process in Kosovo, presented in the third part of this handbook as a value-added resource.

This handbook is dedicated to the international external evaluators of the HEIs in Kosovo and is structured in three parts. The first part introduces the purpose for developing this document, the context of the country and the methodology used. It is followed by part two, comprised of the set of practice-based guidelines to be applied

by the international external evaluators during the HEIs' evaluation in Kosovo grouped in eight (8) themes. The third and last part of the handbook presents a summary of the perspective of the main stakeholders regarding the best practices and lessons learnt during the HEIs external evaluation process, collected through the interviews and the focus group. This part also provides the main conclusion and recommendations for further improvement of HE and QA systems in Kosovo.

PART II - GUIDELINES

As it was highlighted in Part I of this handbook, effective application of the quality assurance standards in Higher Education requires all the stakeholders to have a positive and substantial relation to the local context, which according to the ESG 2015¹² is named the stakeholders' model. According to this model, "all the stakeholders need to see themselves as part of the embedment of QA system into the HE system". Therefore, this section of the handbook will provide practice-based guidelines how the international external evaluators should conduct the external evaluation of HEIs in Kosovo considering the local context, profile of the main stakeholders and External Evaluation Criteria.

1. Higher Education and Quality Assurance Systems

Education in Kosovo is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo¹³, according to which "every person in Kosovo enjoys the right to free basic education, where mandatory education is regulated by law and funded by public funds; b) public institutions shall ensure equal opportunities to education for everyone in accordance with their specific abilities and needs."

Higher education in Kosovo is regulated by the Higher Education Law (Law No.04/L-037), adopted in August 2011, and it is based on the Bologna system principles. These principles focus mainly on the: academic freedom; equality before the law of all HE bearers; equal opportunities for all students and staff in HEIs without discrimination; diversity and quality in study programs; creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship as key objectives of the study programs; an European and International focus for students' and staff's mobility and compatibility of diploma and qualifications; commitment to research and scholarship to support teaching and learning and to expand the knowledge and understanding within Kosovo and abroad; active engagement of students in the life of their institution and own learning.

On the other hand, the Quality Assurance system in Kosovo is regulated by the Administrative Instruction No. 15/2018, which is in line with the principles of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. These principles provision that HEIs have primary responsibility for the quality assurance of their institutions, which should respond to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, study programs, students, other stakeholders, and society in general.

The HE and QA systems in Kosovo are also supported by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which aligns with the Bologna actions. The framework's basic structure is a set of eight levels at which qualifications, modules, and any other components of qualifications can be placed. The Law on National Qualifications (Law 03/L-060) establishes the NQF, which provisions and sets the titles of higher education qualifications in Kosovo, as presented in the Table 1. of this handbook:

¹² Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). (2015). Brussels, Belgium. [accessed on: www.akred-itiimi-ks.org]

¹³ https://mapl.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/1.CONSTITUTION_OF_THE_REPUBLIC_OF_KOSOVO.pdf

Table 1. Higher Education Qualifications in Kosovo as per NQF

Description of the qualification	Level of the NQF qualifications	Credit Value – ECTS	Content
Short cycle of education	5	120 ECTS or less	Link to existing Bachelor level and provide progress in Bachelor degree programmes and above. Special knowledge and skills may be required in certain cases for admission to the Bachelor level or above.
Bachelor	6	180 – 240 ECTS	
Master	7	180 – 240 ECTS	
Doctorate/PhD	8	There is no defined credit worth for these qualifications	

However, regardless of the legislation and its alignment with the Bologna actions and the ESG principles, the Quality Assurance of the Higher Education system in Kosovo remains a challenge. The main red flag challenges are also highlighted by the European Commission’s (EC) progress report¹⁴ “Kosovo Report 2020” and other stakeholders such as the ENQA, KAA, SCQ, and HEIs, and are summarized as follows:

- “outdated law on higher education and delays on the adaption of the new law that would strengthen institutions’ autonomy and improve quality assurance and academic integrity”;
- KAA’s membership revocation by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in September 2019, following Kosovo’s failure to adhere to the ENQA’s rules standards obliges KAA to wait for two years until 2021 before it reappplies for membership;
- KAA has a lack of human resources, operating with only four evaluation and monitoring staff, while the number of applications for re/accreditation is high and ENQA’s rules and standards to meet require commitment and resources;
- “a significant level of corruption and political interference in education”; “non-merit-based recruitment and promotion of academic staff in HEIs”; “insufficient action to address cases of academic misconduct and plagiarism”;
- “high relative number of students (double the EU average), while teacher/student ratios remain unfavourable to students (1:41 in public universities and 1:60 in the private colleges)”;
- underdeveloped research and innovation policy, regardless of the legislation into force -the Law on scientific research activities and a Law on scientific innovation, transfer of knowledge and technology;
- under-funded research and innovation sector: governments have spent “only 0.1% of GDP, despite a 0.7% target mandated by law.”

Important note

- The Law on Higher Education obliges all the international external evaluation experts and other stakeholders involved in the QA of HEIs in Kosovo to apply the principles and standards provisioned by the law, the AI, and the KAA Manual of Standards.
 - KAA is the responsible body to ensure that all the stakeholders have common knowledge on the legal requirements and understanding of the political and cultural context where all the local stakeholders operate.

14 Council of Europe. (2020). Kosovo Report 2020. Brussels. SWD(2020) 356 final, pp.58. [accessed on: https://ec.europa.eu/ neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/kosovo_report_2020.pdf].

2. Main Stakeholders in the HEIs Quality Assurance Process

The main stakeholders involved in the Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions in Kosovo are the Ministry of Education and Science, Kosovo Accreditation Agency, the State Qualifications Council, the Higher Education Institutions, and Students Organisations.

2.1. Ministry of Education and Science

At the central level, the main body responsible for HE policy implementation and licensing all HE institutions is the Ministry of Education and Science (MES). According to article 6 of the Law on HE, the MES is responsible for: a) development of the HE system in Kosovo; b) regulating the status of public and private bearers of higher education and approving their statutes; c) support teaching and research through sub-legal act; d) authorizing the format and content of the Diploma and the Diploma Supplement, issued by the HEIs, in cooperation with the KAA, as defined by a sub-legal act issued by the Ministry; e) development of financial support schemes for students; f) promotion of mobility of staff and students within the European Area as well as promote the use of English for teaching in addition to official languages; g) promotion of equal opportunities in access to and admission to higher education, in staff development and training, in lifelong learning opportunities and in all other aspects of higher education; h) establishment of the State Council for Quality in Higher Education, which advises the Minister on matters of higher education; i) promoting links between public and private Bearers of HE, industry and trade as well as to encourage development of entrepreneurship; j) promoting links between all providers of higher education in Kosovo and higher education institutions in the region and beyond; k) licensing of higher education providers; l) providing assistance, in accordance with this law, to accredited education providers senior and students enrolled there; m) regulation of all other issues related to higher education, which are not regulated separately under this law; respecting and promoting the rights of communities and their members, defined in the Law on Protection and promoting the rights of communities and their members in Kosovo (Law No. 03 / L-047, March 2008).

Important note

Statutes of all universities and any applicant for the title ‘university’ must be ratified by the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo.

2.2. Kosovo Accreditation Agency

The Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) is an independent public Agency established in 2008, responsible for assessing and promoting higher education quality in Kosovo and responsible for accreditation of all public universities and private higher education institutions offering academic degrees. According to the Law on Higher Education, the KAA ensures that the standards and quality of higher education in Kosovo meet the demands and expectations of the European Network of the Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Kosovo Accreditation Agency became a full member of ENQA in 2014, but the membership was revoked in September 2018, after the identification of four flags to be reconsidered by the KAA.

According to Administrative Instruction No. 15/2018, the Kosovo Accreditation Agency has a mandate to:

- carry out the accreditation and re-accreditation of public and private higher education institutions and their academic and research programmes;
- supervise the accredited institutions.

2.3. State Council of Quality

The KAA consists of an Accreditation Board, respectively the State Council of Quality (SCQ), which is the decision-making and policy-making body of the KAA. The Board comprises of nine experienced professionals in higher education with proven experience in science and research, where three of them must be international experts.

2.4. Public HEIs

Public Higher Institutions in Kosovo are established and operate throughout the country, based on the Law on Higher Education. Even though, the public HEIs are founded by a decision of the Ministry of Education, which should be ratified by the Assembly of Kosovo, the law (article 8) guarantees them establishment of the governance structures, which operate in autonomy.

In the academic year 2020/2021, there are nine (9) public higher education institutions that have institutional and study programs accreditation¹⁵, as specified in Table 2. of this handbook.

Important note

The number of accredited public Higher Education Institutions in Kosovo varies from year to year, depending on the re/accreditation process.

Table 2. Public HEIs accredited in Kosovo - institutional and study programs – academic year 2020/2021

Nr.	Name of HEI	Location/Municipality	Website
1	Faculty of Islamic Studies	Prishtinë	www.fsi92.net
2	Kosovo Academy for Public Safety	Vushtrri	www.aksp-ks.net
3	University of Applied Sciences Ferizaj	Ferizaj	www.ushaf.net
4	University of Gjakova “Fehmi Agani”	Gjakovë	www.uni-gjk.org
5	University of Gjilan “Kadri Zeka”	Gjilan	www.uni-gjilan.net
6	University of Mitrovica “Isa Boletini”	Mitrovica South	www.umib.net
7	University of Peja “Haxhi Zeka”	Pejë	www.unhz.eu
8	University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina”	Prishtinë	www.uni-pr.edu
9	University of Prizren “Ukshin Hoti”	Prizren	www.uni-prizren.com

2.5. Private HEIs

The Law on Higher Education in Kosovo provides that a person, company, foundation, trust or association with a legal personality and a registered office in Kosovo can establish a private institution of higher education. Such private HEIs can be organized as Colleges, Professional Higher Vocational Schools, and Academies and have full

¹⁵ <http://www.akreditimi-ks.org>

autonomy in management and administration.

In the academic year 2020/2021, there are 12 private HEIs that have institutional and study programs accreditation, as specified in Table 3.; and 9 private HEIs that have only study programs accreditation¹⁶, as specified in Table 4. of this handbook.

Important Note

The number of private HEIs, which have institutional and study programs accreditation, varies from year to year, depending on the results of applications for re/accreditation.

Table 3. Private HEIs in Kosovo, which have Institutional and Study Programs Accreditation, academic year 2020/2021

Nr.	Name of HEI	Location/Municipality	Website
1	AAB College	Prishtina, Ferizaj, Gjakova	www.aab-edu.net
2	AUK College	Prishtinë	www.kosovo.rit.edu
3	Dardania College	Prishtinë	www.kolegjidardania.com
4	ESLG College	Prishtinë	www.eukos.org
5	Evolucion Academy	Prishtinë	www.akademiaevolucion.com
6	Heimerer College	Prishtinë	www.kolegji-heimerer.eu
7	International Business College Mitrovica (IBCM)	Mitrovica South	www.ibcmmitrovica.eu
8	ISPE College	Prishtinë	www.kolegji-ispe.org
9	Rezonanca College	Prishtinë	www.rezonanca-rks.com
10	Riinvest College	Prishtinë	www.riinvest.net
11	UBT College	Prishtinë	www.ubt-uni.net
12	Universum College	Prishtinë, Ferizaj	www.universum-ks.org

¹⁶ <http://www.akreditimi-ks.org>

Table 4. Private HEIs, which have only Study Programs Accreditation in Kosovo, academic year 2020/2021

Nr.	Name of HEI	Location/Municipality	Website
1	Biznesi College	Prishtinë, Prizren, Gjakove, Vushtrri	www.kolegijbiznesi.com
2	FAMA College	Prishtinë, Gjilan, Prizren, Mitrovicë	www.kolegijfama.eu
3	Globus College	Prishtinë	www.kolegijglobus.com
4	Iliria College	Prishtinë	www.uiliria.org
5	Kosovo Art Academy	Prishtinë	www.kosovoartacademy.eu
6	Pjeter Budi College	Prishtinë	www.pjeterbudi-edu.com
7	Tempulli College	Prishtinë	www.tempulli.org
8	Universi College	Prishtinë	www.kolegijuniversi-edu.net
9	Universum College	Prishtinë, Ferizaj	www.universum-ks.org

2.6. Other HEIs

According to the Law on Higher Education the HEIs established based on a public-private partnership are considered as public institutions if they are established by the law or decision of the Government and ratified by the Assembly. In all other cases, they are considered as private higher education institutions.

Foreign higher education institutions operating in Kosovo are regulated by the regulations for private higher education institutions. If they want to award a Kosovo degree, they must undergo the same re/accreditation and licensing procedures as other private higher education institutions.

If they deliver education leading to a foreign degree, they must demonstrate to KAA that the programme and/ or institution is accredited in accordance with the regulations of its country by a recognized accreditation body.

2.7. Students Organizations within HEIs

Other stakeholders involved in the system are students' organizations, which according to the Law and EU standards are established and operational in each HEI and play a crucial role in the quality assurance process. The student organizations in Kosovo are active bodies either in public or private HEIs.

Important Note: Difference between public and private HEIs

Even though, according to the Law on Higher Education, HEIs in Kosovo have the same objectives and

outcomes, the main distinction between the public and private HEIs relates to the way of foundation, management, and development.

Public HEIs are founded and managed by the Ministry of Education, therefore, decision making related to the statute, budget allocations and strategic decisions require approval of the Ministry and sometimes even the Assembly of Kosovo, and consequently, certain changes and development regarding the QA process in these institutions might require longer periods.

On the other hand, private HEIs are founded and managed through their own funds and based on the legislation into force, decision-making procedures are faster; therefore, these institutions can address changes and development in QA process in a shorter period.

Good practice: Establishment of Advisory Board from Business Community

In terms of improvement the quality assurance and students' employability, a new development in HEIs in Kosovo (public and private) is establishment of the Advisory Boards consisted of the business community members. This development is in align with the ESG 2015 action lines, supporting HEIs with the design of study programs, which enable higher employability of students and long-term development of the higher education institutions.

3. Institutional and Study Programs Re/Accreditation Standards

3.1. Institutional Evaluation Standards

The institutional evaluation standards guidelines are described in the KAA Standards Manual (pages 11 - 26), which can be downloaded as .pdf document from the KAA official webpage¹⁷.

There are 11 institutional evaluation standards and 107 sub-criteria for all standards, which answer the questions below:

- What does the institution intend to achieve? (Public mission and institutional level development, academic integrity and accountability, learning and teaching, research)
- What is the institutions roadmap to achieve its mission and objectives? (Strategic Planning, financial planning, governance, staff employment and professional development, student's administration, and support services)
- How does the institution make sure that it has achieved its mission and objectives? (Quality assurance management)
- How does the institution plan to improve its processes in future? (Learning resources and facilities and institutional cooperation).

The institutional evaluation standards are:

- elaborated by the Higher Education Institution in the SER; and
- elaborated and evaluated accordingly to the peer review process by the external evaluators on the site visit and Review Evaluation Report writing.

3.2. Study Programs Evaluation Standards

The study programs evaluation standards' guidelines are described in the KAA Accreditation Manual (pages 26 - 35), which can be downloaded as .pdf document from the KAA official webpage¹⁸.

There are seven (7) study program/s evaluation standards and 64 sub-criteria for all study program/s standards, which answer the following questions:

- What does the study program intend to achieve? (Mission, objectives and administration)

¹⁷ KAA. (2018). KAA Standards Manual. Prishtina. pp. 11-26. [accessed on: www.akreditimi-ks.org].

¹⁸ KAA. (2018). KAA Standards Manual. Prishtina. pp. 26-35. [accessed on: www.akreditimi-ks.org].

- What is the institutions roadmap to achieve its mission and objectives? (Education process, content learning, academic staff, students, research).
- How does the institution make sure that it has achieved its mission and objectives? (Quality assurance management)
- How does the institution plan to improve its processes in future? (Infrastructure and resources).
- The study programs evaluation standards are:
 - elaborated by the HEIs in the SER, and
 - elaborated and evaluated accordingly to the peer review process by the external evaluators on the site visit and Review Evaluation Report writing.

Important Note

It is important for the external evaluators to familiarize with the applied institutional and study programs evaluation standards and sub-standards prior the start of the evaluation process. The experts should clarify any questions with the KAA, the latest during the training process, in order to have a clear understanding of the standards prior the site visit to the HEI and convey the evaluation results in a brief and clear tone.

4. Institutional and Study Programs External Evaluation¹⁹

The Institutional and Study Programs External Evaluation program in Kosovo is regulated by the legislation into force, which is in full adherence with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG, 2015) for re/accreditation of HEIs. Quality Assurance process of the HEIs is ensured by the KAA and its mechanisms, which take care to make the quality of teaching, learning, and scientific researches internationally comparable.

4.1. External Evaluation

According to Article 5, point 5, of the Administrative Instruction no. 15/2018, the re/ accreditation of HEIs in Kosovo can be done at the level of:

- Higher Education Institutions or Institutional Accreditation;
- Study Program (s);
- The Institution and Study Program(s);
- Branch and study program provided in that branch; and
- Recognition of a valid international accreditation.

Detailed description of the external evaluation process is presented below in the point 5 of this handbook.

4.2. Stages of External Evaluation

The process of External Evaluation of Institutional or Study Programs of HEIs in Kosovo is provisioned by the AI into force and consists of three stages:

- request for re/accreditation;
- site visit to the HEI;
- decision-making consisting of: international experts' external review report and decision of the SCQ.

Detailed description of the external evaluation process is presented below in the point 5.2 of this handbook.

4.3. External Evaluation period

As per AI No. 15/2018 into force, article 19, the HEIs in Kosovo are required to apply for re/accreditation of

their institutions and or study programs at least once every three or five years.

4.4. Schedule of the External Evaluation process

According to the legislative framework, the accreditation process of HEIs in Kosovo is a periodic activity of the KAA. The process of application and re/accreditation for the HEIs is one year, starting as of October 01 of each year and ending on 30 September of the following year. The schedule of the process is provisioned by the AI, and is presented in the Table 5. of this handbook.

Table 5. Institutional and Study Programs accreditation schedule

Period	Activity	Documents required
01-31 October	HEIs submit their applications for re-accreditation	Application form as provided by the KAA.
	HEIs submit their academic staff lists	Academic staff lists and declarations
01 October – 01 October of the following year	HEIs prepare and submit their SER and be ready for the evaluation process	SER and required documents as per Standards guide
	The KAA and SCQ handle evaluation and re/accreditation process for institutional and study programs of HEIs	Information for external evaluators Evaluation team site visit plan Agenda External review report for institutional and study program/s External review report for study program/s Decision of the SCQ for re-accreditation or non re/accreditation of HEIs or their study programs

4.5. Duties and responsibilities of the KAA

KAA is responsible for the implementation of quality assurance procedures at two levels: internal and external. For internal quality assurance, KAA works closely with HEIs and supports them to develop and maintain relevant structures and processes. It has developed guidelines for writing of the Self Evaluation Report (SER) by the HEIs, presented in the KAA's Standards Manual, whose latest version is published on the official website of the KAA. Regarding the external quality assurance, the KAA cooperates with international external evaluators, based on the legal requirements into force.

The general duties and responsibilities of the KAA regarding the institutional and study programs evaluation process include:

- create and manage the pool of international external evaluators;
- form the evaluation Teams and assign them to HEIs;
- plan and provide training to international external evaluators;
- collect and provide feedback to HEIs about application forms, SERs, and attached documents and the progress of each step of the evaluation;
- provide summary reports to SCQ regarding the quality of application forms and academic staff lists submitted by the HEIs for approval or not of their applications;

¹⁹ KAA.(2018). Accreditation Manual. Prishtina. pp. 11-48. [accessed on: <http://www.akreditimi-ks.org>]

- organize and manage the entire evaluation process and site visit for each HEI in Kosovo by liaising with the HEIs, international external evaluators, and SCQ;
- communicate and coordinate the work of international external evaluators over the process of HEIs external evaluation;
- administer contracts with external evaluators;
- communicate the final decision of the SCQ to HEIs and publish it on the website.

In addition to the above tasks, the KAA delegates at least one representative of the Agency to accompany the experts' Team for the entire duration of the site visit, who serves as the coordinator of the visit. KAA's representatives do not play an active role in decision making regarding the experts' recommendations for re/accreditation or non re/accreditation of the HEIs. His/her role is to coordinate communication between the expert teams and HEIs throughout the evaluation process and to guarantee the quality of site visit through objectivity and professionalism. Detailed duties and responsibilities of the KAA's Coordinator are presented in Annex 1 of this handbook.

4.6. Duties and Responsibilities of the evaluation Team/s

The duties and responsibilities of the external evaluation Team/s are set by the Administrative Instruction 15/2018, and the evaluation Team is assigned to conduct the external evaluation of the institution or study program(s) of the HEI.

Composition of the external evaluators' Team:

- A minimum of 2 or a maximum of 7 evaluators;
- At least one student will be appointed to evaluate student matters;
- The same external evaluator team can be assigned to evaluate similar programs in different institutions;
- One of the external evaluators will be appointed as team leader or Chair of the Team and will be responsible for coordinating and drafting the Evaluation Review Report.
- Qualities of the external evaluation Team
 - As defined by the legislation, the list of external international evaluators is composed by the director of KAA and is approved by the SCQ, in align with the defined qualities.
 - The Team should be professional in the relevant evaluation field and experience in quality assessment and accreditation process;
 - The Team members should have Ph.D. scientific qualifications. This does not apply for student evaluators.
 - The Team members should have knowledge and experience of university teaching in the relevant field, except in cases of the student evaluators;
 - The Team members should have scientific researches in a particular field and knowledge about scientific research activities;
 - The Team members should have experience in management, provision of quality, the organizational and administrative structure of an HEI;
 - The Team should have experience in development, implementation, and evaluation of the curricula.

Duties and responsibilities of the international external evaluators are:

- To review documents submitted by the HEIs before the site visit;
- To carry out the site visit to HEI arranged by KAA;
- To draft the draft-evaluating report after the site visit;
- To review comments submitted by the institution on the factual situation of the draft report;
- To finalize the evaluation report for the HEI;
- To submit the final evaluation report to the SCQ.
- The detailed duties and responsibilities of the team leader and team members of the external evaluation Team are provided in Annex 2 of this handbook.

Note: The external evaluator Team/s are informed at least two weeks in advance on the constitution of the Team/s, Institutional and or Study Program/s evaluation criteria, SER and background of the institution and other relevant documents provided by the KAA²⁰.

4.7. Objection of the Evaluation Team by HEIs

According to the AI No. 15/2018, the KAA proposes the evaluation team to HEI prior to the site visit and the HEI has the right to object the composition of the Team, based on evidenced grounds. If there are grounds for objection, the KAA assigns the substitute evaluators.

4.8. Methodology of Work for the Evaluation Team

Methodology of work for external evaluation of HEIs is also provisioned by the AI into force. It comprises of the documents' review and interview methods, but not limited to other methods such as: observation and demonstration of acts on the site.

Important Note

With regards to the methodology, it is important to highlight that during the interviews with the staff members of the HEIs, the external evaluators is good to triangulate the same questions to different target groups within the HEI, in order to verify the accuracy of information provided in the SER and by each group interviewed. This has been proved as a very good practice during the site visits.

According to an example shared by the KAA, "there are cases when, during the site visit one of the external evaluation experts of the KAA met separately with the staff members of the HEI – rector, QA coordinator, academic staff, students - and asked them the same question regarding the 'frequency of meetings' of the Steering Committee of the Institution. The expert received different information regarding the question, where each staff member provided different number of meetings, from six to 20 meetings per year, demonstrating inconsistency in the information provided in SER and during the onsite visit."

4.9. Expenses of the Evaluation Program

The expenses related to the external evaluation process of Higher Education Institutions are covered by the institution subject to evaluation.

5. Institutional and Study Programs Evaluation Process

As provisioned in the AI No. 15/2018, the External Evaluation process of the HEIs in Kosovo consists of three stages and starts with the submission of the request of the education provider for re/accreditation of the institution and or study program (s), followed by site visit of the external evaluators, evaluation review report writing and decision of the SCQ for re/accreditation or non-re/accreditation of the HEI. In this regard, the SER submitted by the HEIs to the KAA is the main document the external evaluators should refer in conducting the external evaluation.

5.1. Self –Evaluation Report

The Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and its attachments are the main documents submitted by the HEIs for the institutional and or study programs evaluation prior the start of the evaluation process. After the process of approval of the HEIs Application for re/accreditation, the HEI should immediately submit the SER accompanied

²⁰ <http://www.akreditimi-ks.org/new/index.php/en/2015-08-31-11-59-45/guidelines-for-experts-new>

by the relevant attachments. According to the guidelines provided in the Standards Manual of the KAA²¹ (pages 37-39), SER should elaborate the position of the institutions and or study programs against the evaluation standards and performance indicators and its commitment to accountability and public responsibility.

According to the legal provisions, SER must:

- be honest and relevant;
- be concise and supported by the attached documents;
- be public on the institution's website;
- present an adequate balance between description and self-critical evaluation;
- be in English including all the attached documents.

5.2. Stage 1: Preparation for the evaluation and the visit

Objectives of the stage 1 of the External Evaluation process for re/accreditation of HEIs are:

- to ensure official application and information of the HEIs and prepare the evaluation team for the site visit;
- to prepare the plan of site visit program with the Team of external international evaluators and support them to review the documents and HEIs during the process.

The KAA and the international external evaluation experts should follow several steps in order to prepare and perform the external evaluation of HEIs, as provided in the following steps.

Step 1. Approval of HEI's request (s) for re/accreditation by the KAA

1. KAA decides on the starting of the external evaluation procedure if the HEI is in full compliance with the eligibility criteria.
2. KAA must ensure that in cases of application for initial accreditation of HEI, the latter has provided accurate evidence of legal entity recognized by the Ministry of Trade and Industry.
3. KAA notifies the HEI if the request for the re/accreditation has been formally approved by the SCQ and provides HEI with 30 days deadline to submit the SER and supporting documents.

Step 2. Creation of the evaluation team(s) and preparation for the site visit

1. KAA appoints the expert Team(s) from the pool of experts it manages.
2. KAA agrees with the HEI on the dates for the site visit and sends the names of the evaluation team members.
3. HEI is given the opportunity to object or argue on potential conflicts of interest of the evaluation team experts;
4. At least two weeks prior the site visit, KAA communicates the site visit programme/agenda and the final team composition to HEI. A sample copy of the site visit programme/agenda can be found in Annex 3 of this handbook.
5. KAA formally invites the expert Team members to take part in the re/accreditation procedure at least two weeks ahead of the evaluation.
6. Upon the formal invitation of KAA to be part of an expert Team, all members sign a declaration to confirm that there are no conflicts of interest with the education provider as well as to confirm the adherence to KAA Code of Ethics (Annex 4 of this handbook).
7. The KAA provides the expert Team with access to all relevant documents and report samples at least two weeks prior the evaluation.
8. The HEI is responsible to make the payment for re/accreditation prior the site visit.

²¹ KAA. (2018). KAA Standards Manual. Prishtina, pp. 37-39. [accessed on: www.akreditimi-ks.org].

Step 3. Preparation of site visit program

1. KAA is responsible to coordinate communication between the HEI and the expert Team during and after the evaluation process.
2. Team leader should communicate with other members of the Team and the KAA and agree on the dates and the site visit schedule and plan, and exchange their opinions regarding the information they all need to conduct the evaluation process..
3. The site visit of an HEI is one to two days, depending on the number of study programs of the institution. The programme plan is based on the External Evaluation Criteria and is designed to enable the institution express itself at the best way possible and allow the expert team to comprehend a thorough evaluation.
4. The external evaluators should prepare the questions prior the site visit, in compliance with the evaluation standards and the agenda.
5. In case the expert Team members need specific information about the HEI and the staff to be interviewed, they should ask KAA and discuss prior the site visit.
6. All the logistics for travelling an accommodation of the international evaluation experts is facilitated by the KAA staff.

Important Note: The international external evaluators should provide concise personal data in order to avoid possible mistakes and delays in the external evaluation process.

5.3 Stage 2: On-Site Visit

According to the KAA's Standards Manual, the site visit starts as a process upon arrival of the expert team members in Kosovo and ends at their departure from the country.

The objectives of the on-site visit are to:

- examine the facilities of HEI in compliance with the standards and the information provided by the HEI in SER;
- discuss with HEI representatives' topics of concern, which might be unclear or inaccurate information provided in SER or attached documents, or topics which are difficult to document in the SER, such as motivation of students and employees, etc.
- support the HEI to further develop its institutional capacities, especially through organizational culture, determination of strengths and areas for further development, through a statement at the end of the visit.

Prior the on-site visit in the HEI's premises the expert Team members should follow the preparation activities as follows:

In the case of face-to-face evaluation, the expert Team members should arrive in the country one night before the on-site visit; otherwise, under the condition of COVID-19 pandemic measures the meetings will be held online.

The team members have the first meeting at the place where they stay (a minimum of two hours meeting is recommended). During this meeting, it is important for them to:

- finally agree on the pre-determined site visit programme,
- ensure mutual understanding within the Team regarding the evaluation criteria,
- review the questions to be addressed during the site visit.

Prior the visit, in the morning of the same day when the site visit happens, the expert Team should attend a two- hour official training regarding the process of evaluation in the offices of the KAA. The training is provided by the KAA officials and it is beneficial regarding the share of information and discussion of questions.

The expert team, the KAA and the representative(s) of the HEI meet in the KAA's offices and agree on the final version of the agenda, prior they leave to the on-site visit.

On- Site Visit

1. The expert team, the KAA's assigned coordinator and HEI's representative leave to the site visit from the KAA's offices after the training they receive the same day.
2. During the on-site visit, it is mandatory to the expert team to evaluate the compliance of HEI against the standards and performance indicators provided in the KAA Standards Manual, through:
3. Site visit of the headquarter of the institution, when this is the case;
4. The visit of all branches of the HEI in cases when the education provider has requested Institutional re/ accreditation.
5. In the case of re/accreditation of study programs, each geographical location (*campuses/branches*), form of delivery (*full time/part time*) and teaching language is considered a distinct process and is subject to a separate submission for accreditation to KAA.
6. Initial meeting with the management of HEI. The chair of the expert Team shall firstly ensure that all attendees understand the external evaluation's purpose and development. During this meeting, no slide presentation is allowed. The meeting is intended as a free discussion of the information provided in SER and other topics the expert team has determined to discuss (an average of 1.5 hours is recommended for the meeting).
7. Meeting with the heads of the study programme (s). In this meeting, the expert Team discusses objectives of the study programmes and their role in the institution's strategic objectives, learning outcomes of the programme, research and development activities if applicable, dissemination of quality assurance in the study programmes, participation of stakeholders into the process, developments in the improvement plans, other topics the Team considers as not clearly defined in SER, (*an average of 1 hour and 10 minutes is recommended for the meeting*).
8. Meeting with quality assurance representatives. The meeting is intended to discuss up-to-date information on the quality assurance system of the institution against the criteria for external evaluation, the role of the quality assurance office in the decision making and management, objectives of the office and their role in the strategic objectives of the institution; quality assurance approach in the process of teaching-learning, its relation to the research activities and other information not clearly defined in SER (*an average of 40 minutes is recommended for the meeting*).
9. If needed the expert Team could meet with the HEI's official during lunch to continue discussion as part of the site visit activities (*an average of 50 to 60 minutes is recommended for the lunch*).
10. Meeting with the academic staff. In this meeting the expert team discusses the teaching staff's role in the quality assurance system, recruitment, development, relation to administration etc, and evaluate against the standards.
11. Meeting with the current students. In the meeting students are asked to share their experience in participation in decision making, quality assurance process, education services and student support service. The meeting with students should be confident and may not be recorded, (*an average of 50 minutes is recommended for the meeting*).
12. Meeting with graduates, where opinions for the HEI are discussed (*an average of 40 minutes is recommended for the meeting*).
13. Meeting with employer of graduates, where opinions for the HEI are discussed (*an average of 40 minutes is recommended for the meeting*).
14. Internal meeting of KAA staff and experts (*an average 10 minutes is recommended*).
15. Closing meeting with the management of the HEI (*an average of 10 minutes is recommended*).
16. The expert team and KAA coordinator leave the institution after the closing meeting with the management of the HEI.
17. Expert Team meets during the dinner and discuss the observations and notes received during the site visit against the standards and performance indicators and agree in principle about the recommendation (*an average of 2 to 4 hours is recommended for this meeting*). This is also closing of the site visit program.
18. During the on-site visit, the expert Team has the right to request supplementary documentation that supports them in evaluating performance of the HEI against the standards and performance indicators, as

presented in the KAA Standards Manual. The expert team can only request supplementary documentation that the institution has already referred to during the site visit or through the Self-Evaluation Report; the Team cannot request the HEI to produce new documentation.

19. The expert team can request additional meetings to be included on the site visit agenda, such as meeting with the administrative staff to give them the opportunity to confirm the compliance of the SER documentation against the state of affairs at the date of site visit; also, the site visit will include a visit to the facilities the provider is using for its activities. In these cases, the visits should be well-planned not to disturb the teaching activity. Sometimes, the HEI must offer concrete evidence of applying internal procedures for the development of the study programs submitted for evaluation.

Important Note

Experts shall attend teaching activities only if:

- there are problems that experts consider to best understand by such direct attendance, only;
- class attendance may help confirm a judgement referring to an example of good practice; HEI cannot offer any other evidence to prove that the teaching activity is of adequate quality;
- there are signs that the students' learning opportunities and infrastructure available are not satisfactory.

5.4. Stage 3: Drafting and Approving the External Review Report

The main objectives of the third stage of External Evaluation process are:

- Draft the External Review Report where institution's review on the findings during the site visit is enabled;
- Provide the Higher Education Institution the opportunity to express the opinion on the process through comments;
- Ensure consistency of HEI's compliance with the accreditation standards.

All the correspondence between the expert team and the KAA will be moderated by the KAA and will be electronic throughout the process.

The main activities that the expert team is expected to conduct during this stage are:

1. The experts' Team has the right to request in the process of report drafting supplementary documentation that supports them in evaluating performance of the education provider against the standards and performance indicators into force. However, the expert team can only request supplementary documentation that the provider has already referred to during the site visit or through the self-evaluation report; the Team cannot ask the education provider to produce new documentation;
2. Chair of the expert team is responsible to ensure that the External Review Report is collectively agreed by all members of the Team and that results of the evaluation are included in the Report;
3. The External Review Report will be provided to the expert team by the KAA and the experts should respect the structure of the report and elaborate evaluation of all the standards accordingly.
4. The chair of the expert Team submits the External Review Report to KAA no later than two weeks after the site visit;
5. The External Review Report is validated by the KAA immediately after its submission. The KAA validates the report if it respects the general structure provided in the Standards Manual; if it has a coherent flow between the body of the report and the Expert team recommendation (the recommendation has to be fully supported by evidence and arguments included in the body of the report). The validation process may include further communication between KAA and the expert team so as to bring the External Review Report in line with the present guidelines;
6. After the validation of the External Review Report, it is sent to the Higher Education Institution giving it the chance to provide its comments and correct any potential factual errors that might have been included. During this dialogue, the institution cannot submit further information and evidence that have not been already

referred to during the site visit or through the self-evaluation report. Any such new evidence can only be introduced under a new evaluation process that will represent a separate application to KAA.

7. After receiving the potential comments from the education provider, the Expert Team analyses whether any corrections should be operated, finalizes the reports and submits it to KAA.

6. External Review Report Writing

6.1. Content of the External Review Report

The purpose of the External Evaluation Report is to provide guidance to the Higher Education Institutions about the level of their compliance in implementing the quality assurance standards, good practices and examples for further development of their institutions and fulfilling their missions in terms of education advancement but also the contribution in research and social development. The Report should reflect the consensus of the Team. The template of the Report will be provided by the KAA or can be downloaded from the official webpage of the KAA²².

6.2. Principles of External Review Report Writing

Based on the good practices of the External Evaluation process, the team members should sit immediately after the site visit and agree on the compliance level of each standard and the expected result/recommendation of the evaluation process. This is considered as a very important step because the consensus between the Team can be discussed accurately while the information is fresh and handy.

The following principles should guide writing of the review report:

Accuracy: the terms and definitions in the report writing should be in full compliance with the standards, legislation and the referrals of HEI.

Evidence-based: the evaluation should be supported with evidence without using personal views or assumptions.

Impartibility: the findings should not reflect exaggeration or criticism.

Language: the language should be clear and concise.

Format: As per format sample provided by the KAA, the report must comply with the KAA Standards Manual in every part of it. The report should be typed in 12-point Times New Roman and 1.15 line spacing.

Samples of the good practice of External Review Report writing for institutional and study programs re/ accreditation are provided in **Annex 5** and **Annex 6** of this handbook.

6.3. Compliance calculation/assessment template

Assessment of the higher education institutions and/or study programs is made based on a four-level compliance scale, regulated by the legislation into force and is structured as follows:

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

To be granted a positive decision for the program and institutional re/accreditation, 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.

²² www.akreditimi-ks.org

The Compliance Calculation templates for evaluation of the Institutional Standards and the Study Programs Standards can be found in Annex 7 and Annex 8 of this handbook.

7. Decision on Re/Accreditation of HEIs and Its Publication

7.1. Decision

According to the Article 18 of the AI 15/2018, after receiving the final External Review Report from the expert team, the KAA director shall compile a summary of the evaluation report based on the recommendations of the external valuers and shall present it to the SCQ.

The State Council of Quality is obliged by the legislation into force to make the decision on re/accreditation or non re/accreditation of the HEI, based on the recommendations of the external evaluators.

The Council can make one of the following decisions:

a) In the case of initial institutional accreditation:

- Not to accredit;
- Accredit for 3 years.

b) In the case of institutional re-accreditation:

- Not to accredit;
- Accredit for three (3) years;
- Accredit for five (5) years, unless the Team of external evaluators recommend another time limit and that recommendation is approved by the SCQ.

c) In the case of study programme re/accreditation:

- Not to accredit;
- Accredit for three (3) years);
- Accredit for five (5) years), unless the Team of external evaluators recommend another time limit and that recommendation gets approved by the SCQ.

Additionally, in the case of re-accreditation of bachelor and masters study programs, the Council will also make a decision on the maximum number of students to be enrolled in the study program.

In the cases when the SCQ makes a decision not to re/accredit/to withdraw/to suspend the accreditation of a study programme or the institution, the HEI:

- loses its right to enroll new students in the particular programme, while registered students continue their studies according to the statute of the HEI;
- is obliged to submit a request for a new external evaluation within one year of KAA's decision;
- If the HEI fails to meet the quality standards in two consecutive external evaluations, it will lose the institutional accreditation and the license issued by the Ministry of Education and Science according to the law.

Important Note: Exceptionally the SCQ may make a different decision from the recommendation of the Team of external evaluators if the SCQ determines that the factual status of the report is not in accordance with the final recommendation of external evaluators.

7.2. Appeals on the Decision of SCQ

According to the article 22 of the AI 15/2018, the HEIs have the right to appeal the decision of the SCQ on re/accreditation of their institutions or study programs.

The HEIs should submit the appeal to the Appeals Commission within 30 days after receiving the decision rendered by SCQ, in compliance with the instructions provided by the KAA Procedure for complaints and

appeals.

The appeals must be reviewed by the Appeals Commission, which is composed of five (5) members selected by an interim commission appointed by the Minister of the Ministry of Education and Science.

The Appeals Commission should reply to the HEI over the appeal against the SCQ's decision within a 30 days period after receiving the appeal from the HEI.

This decision made after the analysis of the appeal is final and may not be the subject of a new appeal to KAA. Should the education provider continue to be dissatisfied with the final decision of KAA, it may take further action under provisions of the Law on General Administrative Procedure No. 05/L-031.

7.3 Publication of the SCQ's Decision on Re/Accreditation of HEIs

KAA publishes its decision together with the External Review Report on its official website not later than two weeks after the meeting of the State Council of Quality and education provider is being given the final report.

8. Monitoring of HEIs / Follow-Up Recommendations

According to the AI 15/2018, article 10, point 1.8, the KAA will monitor the HEI according to the provisions of this AI.

Monitoring of the follow-up recommendations should be made by international experts, upon the re-accreditation process.

HEIs are expected to formally submit their plan how they are going to address the recommendations provided by the expert Team within two months, after they receive the External Evaluation Review Report. The Follow-up plan will individually approach each of the recommendations in the External Review Report and will describe how they will be addressed and implemented by the education provider – that will include the mechanism/instrument/measure the provider plans to use for each of the recommendations' implementation, who is the individual responsible, the planned timeframe for completion.

According to the article 20 of the AI, accredited HEIs must submit a comprehensive annual report to the KAA at the beginning of each academic year on their activities including improvement plan based on recommendations of the External expert Teamreport.

In addition to monitoring of the follow-up recommendations provided to the HEIs by the expert Team, article 21 of the AI provisions the following actions related to the monitoring process of HEIs:

- the KAA reserves the right to monitor and control the quality of accredited HEIs at any time and without prior notification, KAA can withdraw the re/accreditation when:
 - the re/accreditation gets violated,
 - it is found that the HEI has submitted false information or documentation during the process of external evaluation;
 - when the monitoring report of international evaluators ascertains that recommendations of external evaluators have not been implemented according to the deadlines set in the report or the factual situation in the HEI is severely damaged in terms of quality.

PART III – SUMMING UP

As described in the first part of the document, the purpose of this handbook is to provide the international external evaluators with information about the contexts in which the Higher Education Institutions operate in Kosovo, and practice-based guidelines to conduct the external evaluation process, which leads towards the re/accreditation or non-re/accreditation of the HEIs.

The guidelines have been developed through the deskwork and interviews/focus group conducted with the main stakeholders of the quality assurance process in higher education in Kosovo, such as the KAA, SCQ, international external evaluators, HEIs and students organizations, which have provided the practical approach in development of the guidelines. The research methodology, main findings, and results of the interviews/focus group with the main stakeholders of the quality assurance process in HE in Kosovo are presented in Annex 9 of this handbook. This annex provides a summary of the good practices, challenges,

needs, gaps, and lessons learnt through the external evaluation process with the aim of improving the experience of quality assurance in Higher Education, inspiring a broader understanding of the process.

In addition to the interviews and focus group, KAA has also discussed the process of guidelines' development with the ENQA, who shared the best experiences of different members in conducting such exercises.

The last part of the document, but not the least, provides a beneficial experience through sharing the most frequently asked questions about the external evaluation of HEIs in Kosovo and the epilogue related to development of this handbook.

III.A. The Most Frequently Asked Questions

KAA considers that addressing of the main queries in this handbook is an added value to the guidelines, and the international external evaluators can refer to it at any time. This part of the document will regularly be updated sharing the most frequently asked questions in real time.

Question: What kind of quality assurance/accreditation procedure is provided in Kosovo?

Answer: The legislation adopted in Kosovo is based to the good practices of Evaluation and Accreditation procedures, where HEIs should meet the minimal standards and there is some flexibility that enables continues improvement. The Auditing style of accreditation where the HEI evaluation and accredit themselves is not yet applied to continuation of reforms in the HE and QA system.

Question: Are evaluators obliged to be informed with the legislation into force in Kosovo?

Answer: Yes, the external evaluators should familiarize themselves with the legislation procedures and standards as described in the documents provided by the KAA. There are examples when the recommendation of the expert has provided one-year accreditation to one HEI, while the legislation provisions only three and five years accreditations.

Question: What are the final deliverables of the external evaluation process and what standards should the experts' address.

Answer: The experts are assigned to the exercise and are obliged to read all the relevant documents as provisioned by the legislation including the SER, attached documents and the Standards Manual. Experts should address and elaborate all the standards one by one, but they should be prepared and address questions regarding the standards to the specific target group within the HEI. Sometimes, one standard may be repeated to ensure truthfulness of the information.

Question: Should external evaluators verify each standard on the site visit?

Answer: Yes, the evaluators should verify each standard on the site visit and evaluate the level of compliance of the HEI with the external evaluation criteria, by providing arguments and comments based on the desk review, interviews, observation and other verifications during the site visit.

Question: What happens with the students if a HEI doesn't get re/accredited?

Answer: During the Evaluation process, according to the legislation into force, all HEIs are obliged to submit the evidence of agreement with another HEI in Kosovo and bank guarantee where is specified that in case of failure to re/accreditation, it will transfer the existing students to that institution.

Question: Where public HEIs differ from private ones?

Answer: The main distinction between public and private HEIs relate to the way how each of them is found and operates. The public HEIs are founded by the Ministry of Education and the Assembly of Kosovo, while the private ones are founded by individual owners or group of interest. Operationally, the public HEIs also required plenty of approvals from the Assembly of Kosovo and the Ministry, especially concerning the statute and the budget, while the private ones have the autonomy and flexibility to decide within their internal bodies.

Question: How long is the duration of re/accreditation for HEIs and or study programmes?

Answer: According to article 19 of the AI no 15/2018, the initial institutional accreditation is three (3) years, while re/accreditation no longer than five (5) years, unless the Team of external evaluators recommend another time limit and that recommendation receives approval of SCQ. Meanwhile, the duration of study program re/accreditation is three (3) up to five (5) years, unless the Team of external evaluators recommend another time limit and that recommendation receives approval of SCQ.

Question: What is the procedure when expert Team does not reach a consensus on the result of the External Review Report?

Answer: According to article 17, point four of the AI no. 15/2018, if there is no consensus reached among the evaluators a statement should be compiled and attached to the report in the form of clarification.

Question: When shall the external evaluator expect execution of the payment?

Answer: Execution of the payment should be expected within the deadline provided in the contract. However, the expert should be cautious that delays on execution of the payment may occur due to administrative procedures of the public administration.

Question: When are the experts expected to submit the final Evaluation Report?

Answer: Expert Team is obliged to submit the final Evaluation Review Report for re/accreditation of the HEI and or study programs no later than four (4) weeks after the site visit.

Question: Where can I find the Evaluation Review Report template?

Answer: The Evaluation Review Report template will be provided by the KAA or you may download it from the official website of the KAA.

Question: Should the expert team elaborate each standard while writing the Evaluation Review Report?

Answer: Yes, the expert team should elaborate and evaluate each standard in the Evaluation Review Report and should assess each criterion based on the evidence.

Question: When the Evaluation Review Report can be refused by the SCQ?

Answer: The SCQ of the KAA may refuse the Evaluation Review Report submitted by the Team of Exeperts, when the report does not respect the format, principles and the set criteria, especially in the cases when the standards or sub-criteria are not evaluated, or when there is a disharmony between the specific standards and the general recommendation.

III.B. The epilogue

Kosovo Accreditation Agency believes that these practice-based guidelines lead toward improvement of the induction process regarding the external evaluation of higher education institutions not only for the international evaluation experts, but also for other stakeholders involved in the Quality Assurance process. KAA considers that the exercise has addressed one of the selected ENQA recommendations for improvement of the quality assurance process in higher education system in Kosovo. In such an exercise, it is a common sense to base development of the guidelines on the principles and legislation into force and validate them with the practical approach and perspectives of the main stakeholders in the QA system.

This handbook is a living document, and in the near future, KAA will consider its enrichment with additional samples of good practices and challenges, more guidelines on the evaluation of standards and other ‘what to do’ and ‘how to do’ guides during different stages of the evaluation process.

The KAA is working hard to make the external evaluation process of HEIs a beneficial experience for both the education institutions and external evaluators contributing thus to continual improvement of the HEIs and the HE system in Kosovo, in order to meet the ENQA standards and be in line with the principles of ESG (2015).

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Administrative Instruction
ASK	Agency of Statistics of Kosovo
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ERA	European Research Area
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HERAS+	Higher Education Research & Applied Science Plus
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KAA	Kosovo Accreditation Agency
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
MEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
QA	Quality Assurance
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SER	Self Evaluation Report
WB	World Bank

ANNEXES

- Annex 1 – Duties and Responsibilities of KAA Coordinator
- Annex 2 – Responsibilities of Team Leader and Team Members
- Annex 3 – Site visit program plan / agenda
- Annex 4 – KAA Code of Ethics
- Annex 5 – Review institutional and study program evaluation report sample
- Annex 6 – Review study program evaluation report sample
- Annex 7 – Compliance calculation template for institutional evaluation
- Annex 8 – Compliance calculation template for study program evaluation
- Annex 9 – Good practices and lessons learnt

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